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This is the first unit in a series of instructional materials arising from an exploratory study of cultural barriers to communication between North Americans and Colombians. A syllogistic model, in which our unspoken and unconscious assumptions comprise the major premise, is used to explain the difficulties of intercultural communication. These silent assumptions are revealed and explained through the material presented, which consists of (1) a physical description of Bogota, highlighting the foreigner's first impressions, (2) the experiences and impressions of one composite North American student upon arrival in the city, and (3) a case study of a cross-cultural misunderstanding involving the Colombian family unit. An appendix lists idioms peculiar to Colombian Spanish. For companion documents, see the original exploratory study, FL 001 088 and Unit 2 of the instructional materials, FL 001 089. (DS)

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INITIAL IMMERSION
IN THE
FOREIGN CULTURE

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by
Raymond L. Gorden

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These materials are based upon research done in Colombia under contract # 1-7-070267-3973 between Antioch College (administrative agent for the Latin America Program of the Great Lakes Colleges Association) and the U. S. Office of Education in cooperation with CEUCA (Centro de Estudios Universitarios Colombo-Americano) which is the GLCA Center in Bogotá. The project is locally known in Bogotá as Proyecto IDET (Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación Transcultural).

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Introduction to the Series

This unit is one of a series aimed at exploring, discovering and analysing the non-linguistic barriers to communication between North Americans and Latin Americans.

Each unit in the series illustrates the basic idea that in any communicative act between human beings the meaning is not entirely contained within the message as is the peanut within its shell. Instead, the functional meaning results from the interaction in men's minds between the overt stated message and the covert unstated assumptions which provide the silent context for interpreting the meaning of the message. Therefore, the success of any particular message depends upon not only the communicators' sharing a common vocabulary, syntax and grammar, but also their sharing a common set of beliefs and values.

This interaction between the message and the silent assumptions has been made more explicit in the syllogistic model of cross-cultural communication which can be stated as follows:

> The meaning in any cross-cultural communication is like the conclusion of a syllogism in which the stated message is the minor premise and the major premise consists of those culturally based, usually unconscious, assumptions which are unstated yet supply the silent context for the interpretation of the meaning of the message.
>
> From this model we can deduce that cross-cultural communication can break down in two basically different ways even when the verbal message (minor premise) is clearly shared by sender and receiver:
>
> (a) If there is a discrepancy between the major premises held by the two communicators, it is possible for each to draw different conclusions from the same message.

> (b) If the communicators have strong negative attitudes toward each other which involve the messages being exchanged, they may arrive at different conclusions even though they share the same major premise, because their emotions interfere with the logical process of drawing a conclusion consistent with the major and minor premises.

A U.S.-Colombian team of interviewers and participant observers studied the interaction between North Americans (GLCA students and Peace Corps Trainees)[1] and the Latin Americans with whom they communicated in Bogotá, Colombia.

The first step was to discover examples of miscommunication and to ferret out which were caused by non-linguistic differences between the two cultures rather than by the North American's imperfect command of Spanish.

The major focus of the search was for differences between the two cultures, as represented by these specific North Americans and Latin Americans, which comprised dissonant major premises in the syllogistic model. In some cases the difference between cultural patterns would be the same for any North American communicating with any Latin American. This occurs when the North American pattern is uniform throughout the United States, and the Latin American pattern is also uniform throughout Latin

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[1] These college students and Peace Corps Trainees were all involved in the program at CEUCA (the Centro de Estudios Universitarios Colombo-Americano) administered by Antioch College for the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA). This association includes twelve colleges (Albion, Antioch, Denison, De Pauw, Earlham, Hope, Kalamazoo, Kenyon, Oberlin, Ohio Wesleyan, Wabash, and Wooster) all private institutions in Indiana, Michigan and Ohio.

America. An example of this type of barrier is the Spanish personal naming system as it clashes with the North American system.

The degree of universality of other cultural differences has not yet been determined. In these cases the patterns found in Bogotá, may not be applicable to all Latin America; or the patterns typical of these particular North Americans may not be found in all sub-cultures (sex, age, social class, race, religion, or region) of the United States. Although a unit derived from these differences does not serve as a specific guide to any North American communicating with any Latin American, such a unit fulfills several useful functions:

(a) It helps demonstrate the range of applicability of the general syllogistic model of cross-cultural communication.

(b) It can sensitize us to the kinds of culture patterns which may be contained in the silent assumptions comprising the major premise of the model.

(c) In some instances it helps suggest practical procedures for us to use in discovering the specific barriers in a concrete situation.

Some of the units include certain linguistic tools (such as Colombianismos and specialized vocabularies in Spanish) or paralinguistic factors (gestures or expressions) likely to be associated with the particular settings in which the non-linguistic barriers were discovered. This should increase the practical value of units where the linguistic and non-linguistic factors are closely intertwined.

> "As the Spanish proverb says, 'He who would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry the wealth of the Indies with him,' so it is in traveling, a man must carry knowledge with him if he would bring home knowledge."
>
> Boswell, Life of Dr. Johnson

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Foundations for potential cross-cultural miscommunication are firmly laid as we assimilate our own culture. This potential is suddenly converted into the real dynamic process the moment we arrive in a foreign country.

> "Foreigners are people somewhere else,
> Natives are people at home;
> If the place you're at is your habitat,
> You're a foreigner, say, in Rome."[1]

As soon as the American arrives, he is immediately converted into a foreigner. A large portion of his initial communication with the foreign culture is a visual exchange. The newly arrived foreigner is all eyes and ears. His first auditory and visual images are cluttered with excitement, confusion, surprise, mis-observations, and even conflict. At the same time, he is making an impression on the nationals.

Often he expects this initial confrontation to be the principal impact phase of culture shock when in fact it is mainly a euphoric state of excitement. The novelty of the situation tends to neutralize the superficial shocks, surprises and frustrations. Nevertheless, the initial impressions received and given by the American abroad constitute an important and fascinating phase of cross-cultural communication which lays the background for his subsequent experiences.

This unit on the Initial Immersion in the Foreign Culture is developed in three phases. First is a birdseye view of Bogotá and the salient impressions which strike the arriving American. This provides a backdrop for the two case studies to follow. This scene setting does not introduce any communication problems.

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[1] Ogden Nash, "Goody for Our Side and Your Side Too."

Second we present the case study of "John's Arrival in Bogotá." John is a composite character in that not all of these events happened to any one of the arriving Americans who were interviewed. However, he does not incorporate all of the problems which were encountered by those we interviewed. Instead, this case study is designed to illustrate realistically some typical communication problems encountered by the American in the first 24 hours of his encounter with the foreign culture. It not only illustrates a range of concrete communication problems but also provides additional detail about the Bogotá setting as context for understanding the second case study.

Third we present another case study which deals with the initial immersion period beyond the first 24 hours. The focus here is on the American's initial adjustment to the Colombian host family. The discussion explicates the theoretical analysis, according to the model given in the "Introduction to the Series." Robert, the main character in this second case study, is not a composite since all of the details reported happened to one person. But he is a representative of several Americans who had the same general reaction to a Colombian family.

Not all of the communication problems symptomatically expressed in these two case studies are pointed out, discussed or analyzed. They are included to enrich the context, to provoke those with a more sensitive eye for communication problems, and to foreshadow subsequent cases which will explicate and analyze such problems in detail.

I. Bogotá

A. A background sketch.

Before seeing the arrival in Bogotá through the eyes of our composite American, we will briefly sketch the city and the home of the typical Colombian host family.

The Sabana de Bogotá is a large mountain valley in the Cordillera Oriental (eastern range) of the Colombian Andes mountains. Bogotá, the rapidly growing capital city of 2,000,000 people, nestles against the mountains on the eastern edge of the Sabana at 8,700 feet above sea level. Here the mountains rise dramatically another 2,000 feet, providing a green backdrop for the city. The airview of the Sabana reveals a panorama of patch-quilt farms on the broad flat bottom lands.

Although Bogotá is near the equator, the altitude provides it with a springlike climate with less difference in temperature between June and January than between a sunny morning and a cloudy afternoon. The only seasonal differences are rainy and dry. During the two rainy seasons of November and April there may be heavy rains every day. During the drier seasons of January and July there is practically no rain, and there may be shortages of water or milk in the city.

Bogotá, built on the site of the pre-conquest Chibcha Indians city of Bacatá, was christened by the Spanish conquistadores as Santa Fé de Bacatá, which became Santa Fé de Bogotá. This was shortened later to simply Bogotá. Today the city runs about eleven miles from north to south and is about four miles wide. The mountains form its eastern limit. The calles, which run east and west, are numbered from about 60th south to about 150th north.

Most of the families in the southern barrios of the city are poor, too poor to have the accommodations or the health standards desired by a middleclass foreign guest. Therefore, most of the host families live in the near-north section of the city, and most are in the middle socio-economic class.

B. Immediate impressions.

From interviews with many North Americans we find that most of the immediate impressions received are those which contrast with the patterns found in cities in the United States. North Americans are struck by the fact that a city of 2,000,000 people could be so non-industrial. Even before the jet lands at Eldorado International Airport, complete absence of smoke or smog is apparent. The realization that Bogotá is a metropolis in a predominantely agrarian national economy is revealed in details which startle the urban American.

The five-mile ride between the airport and the heart of the city shows the penetration of the rural way of life. The occasional horse-drawn cart or wagon, the cows grazing on the median separating the two directions of the Autopista foreshadow bits of the rural culture to be found further within the city. Boys urinating on the streets or in vacant lots, rural women breast-feeding their babies as they tend their little vending stand, the lone but unperturbed burro sauntering across Avenida Caracas during rush hour, the flock of chickens being raised in the patio of the auto repair shop a half block from a main thoroughfare, the Indian woman crossing busy Carrera Séptima at Calle 85, with the train of leña-laden burros and mules she brought down the mountain road from La Calera, or the Ecuadorian Indians selling colorful handwoven woolen blankets and ruanas as they walk through the streets-- all of these evidence the agrarian underpinnings of this metropolis Bogotá, which already contains ten percent of Colombia's rapidly growing population and daily receives more migrants from the country.

In contrast the norteamericano sees the more familiar skyscrapers of steel, stone and glass. During the rush hours, the streets are packed with cars, taxis, buses and an ocassional trolleybus. He reads in the paper that Bogotá is planning an atomic energy museum. He sees the flashing neon signs advertising Icollantas, Philips (electrical appliances not milk of magnesia), Coca Cola, Goodrich, Avianca, PAA, BOAC. He sees posters announcing the Lenningrad Ballet, a Cantinflas movie, burlesque shows from Argentina, all imported competitors with the bullfight at the local Plaza de Santamaría.

Although heavy traffic is familiar to the norteamericano he is still puzzled and sometimes startled by the behavior of the drivers who ignore practically every stop sign while they generally obey light signals. He can see no relationship between the drivers' hand signals and what the cars do. He sees chaos everywhere. Pedestrians cross against the light in the middle of the block, cars park on the sidewalks and on the wrong side of the street, horns toot impatiently when the light changes or when a cab stops to let out a passenger, and busses pick up passengers in the middle of the block. His first cab ride is unforgettably spiced with excitement and fear. Everyone's behavior seems unpredictable but agressive.

The North American may be unhappy as a passenger in a taxi, but he is equally unhappy if he is a pedestrian. He is distressed or even a bit paranoid about the traps he encounters in the sidewalks, parkways and crossings. Pits which are dug in the sidewalks to repair telephone lines or water pipes are left open with no light, sign or barrier to warn the nocturnal pedestrian. Man-holes are left uncovered. There seems to be a constant wall-building program. Walls are built around a building site instead of putting up a cheap board fence as is the custom in the United States. Ten foot brick walls surround vacant lots which seems a waste of materials and effort. The sidewalks are full of cracks, humps and holes. In the residential areas they end abruptly for 50 or 100 feet and then start again. In the business areas it is not unusual for the sidewalks to vary in width from five to twenty feet. Then to complicate the pedestrian's life the level of the sidewalks changes frequently at the boundary of a building.

When he first arrives in Bogotá, the North American finds it difficult to believe most of this "chaos" will seem quite normal in a few months.

C. Residential areas.

The residential areas in which most of the norteamericanos in this study lived were neither in the average Colombian economic level nor in the plush areas where the concentration of resident Americans live (such as in El Chicó and Santa Ana), but in the middle and uppermiddle class Colombian areas. The host family areas have physical characteristics contrasting markedly with middleclass residential areas in the U.S.A.

Despite the wide variations in the physical arrangements of both U.S. and Colombian residences, we can make some clear generalizations regarding the cross-cultural contrasts.

The commonalities of the middleclass neighborhoods are the familiar sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and parkways with grass and trees. But the similarity ends at the front gate. More than 98% of the host family houses are typically Bogotano in that each house is attached to those on either side, while the typical U.S. pattern (often required by the local building codes) leaves some minimal space to separate one house from the other. The typical Bogotano middleclass home has no large front yard; it is situated close to the sidewalk with only a planter of shrubs or a small yard 10 to 15 feet deep, surrounded by a wall, fence, or hedge from two to seven feet tall.

The view down a residential street gives the impression of a continuous two-story wall punctured at the lower level with alternating large and small doors and hung with planters, bay windows, or balconies above. It is not at all obvious to the norteamericano which driveway or garage goes with which home because it is not at all evident to him where one house ends and the other one begins. He learns to note carefully the changes in the facing material, texture and color or to look for the tell-tale breaks in the roofline which mark the end of one house and the beginning of the next.

Generally, there are no separate free-standing garages or carports but about 75% of the host families have a garage as an integral part of the house. In about 20% of these homes the garage constitutes a showroom for the car which can be seen from the livingroom and dining room.

More than 90% of the host homes are two or more stories high. The concept of the low ground-hugging house surrounded by several thousand square feet of lawn to mow and crab grass to defeat is a foreign image to the middleclass bogotano. There may be a small, well-manicured lawn in front, but inside the major portion of the patio will be lawn and flowers. The living area appears to be wrong-side-out to the norteamericano who is not accustomed to having the lawn and flowers inside the house. However, he is delighted by the amount and variety of flowers blooming at all times of the year in some of the most unexpected places such as tops of patio walls, roof terraces, and window planters.

The orientation of the house with respect to the sun is an important factor in the indoor temperature. To the *norteamericano* the homes are chilly; houses facing the *calles* (which run east and west) are much less comfortable than those on the *carreras*. Since these houses are all attached to each other, the windows are only on the front and back of the house. If the house faces a *carrera* (which runs north and south) it receives both the morning and afternoon sun, but those on the *calles* receive none. Bogotá is so near the equator that the sun passes directly overhead without shining in the windows on either the north or south side of the house. If the sun does not shine for several days, which might happen in the wet season, it matters little how the house is oriented. It will be chilly in either case. And since there is no central heating one might be able to sleep comfortably only if wearing very warm pajamas or by adding a sweater or socks.

Not only do the houses abut their next door neighbor, but also each back patio is likely to share a common separating wall from seven to twelve feet tall with the house facing the street behind. This means that alleys are unknown in residential areas and rarely exist in the downtown business section.

The immediate impressions received by the *norteamericano* in the first 24 hours are mainly physical; later he begins to discover contrasts in the non-material culture which may or may not be related to the initial physical observations. For example, the dense traffic becomes even more of a puzzle when the norteamericano learns that a new Volkswagen bug costs about $7,000 because there is a 250% luxury tax on passenger cars. He is amazed by relative costs: a bus ride for three cents and apples $1.00 per pound; oranges 20¢ a dozen and grapes 75¢ per pound or a six-ounce jar of mayonnaise for $1.00. He also begins to learn the social implications of not having alleys, of having two-story houses attached to one another, and of having firewood delivered on burros.

Thus far we have only sketched a bit of the physical environment which impressed the newly arriving norteamericano. Let us now obtain the reactions of John Seymour (that composite North American student) as he leaves the U.S. and arrives in Bogotá.

II. John's Arrival in Bogotá

John Seymour, a college junior from Michigan, headed for Bogotá from Miami on the last possible plane in order to spend a two-day layover basking on the beach in Miami. As he took off for Bogotá, he was still enjoying the after-glow of his fun in the sun. It seemed only a few minutes later that he was roused from his reverie by people looking out of the windows. He looked down and saw land! When he discovered that it was not Key West but Cuba that they had just passed over, he began trying to adjust to the idea of arriving in Bogotá in about an hour and a half.

He settled down to relax and enjoy the view of the Caribbean. What a shame to soar right past Jamaica with no time to land and look around. The sight of Kingston at the water's edge, silhoutted by the mountains' concave sweep upward to the fleecy clouds, stirred a strong feeling of the romantic. How different from January in northern Michigan where the snow drifts were so high that cars kept red plastic pennants on their radio aerials to be seen as they approached a cross road.

It was easy to be mesmerized by the changing colors of the Caribbean. While savoring the patterns of blues, shading into areas of patterned white, brown and green, he leaned forward realizing that what he has assumed to be a long sand bar with wind-swept dunes dotted with small plants was actually all under water. The water was so clear that the contours of the gullies carved by ocean currents appeared to be above the water's surface. A closer look showed that there was a real island in the middle of this shoal. From that altitude the breaker line surrounding the island was a white thread lying in an assymetical loop upon the surface of the ocean. On both sides of this telltale line the color of the sand and vegetation appeared almost identical.

The plane's speaker system cut with John's absorption with color and design:

> "Habla su capitán Ramírez. Estamos volando con velocidad de 900 kilómetros por hora sin escalas hacia el aeropuerto internacional Eldorado.. Vamos a llegar en conformidad con el horario a las diez y siete horas y quince minutos. La temperatura en Bogotá es en este momento de diez y nueve grados".

This announcement in Spanish again forced John to think about arriving in a foreign country only three hours after leaving the United States. Could he muster enough flexibility to meet the realities of this jet age world? He was beginning to have misgivings for not flying two days earlier with the group which had been met at the airport in Bogotá. He fumbled for his arrival instructions and felt a bit reassured to see that the information about going through the aduana, calling the Centro de Estudios Universitarios Colombo-Americano, and taking a taxi were apparently complete. Here are John's reactions in his own words:

> "I had given some thought to the idea of arriving in Bogotá but it was all sort of theoretical. It wasn't until the stewardess announced, "Favor de abrochar su cinturón y observar el aviso de no fumar. Nos preparamos a aterrizar en el Aeropuerto Internacional de Eldorado en Bogotá, Colombia", that I became just a bit panicky. I was worried a little about going through customs. They offered us coffee while we were waiting. I couldn't decide whether we were supposed to pay for it or whether it was gratis. I noticed that everyone was taking it as the little boy came around with his tray of small cups. I couldn't understand what he said. It sounded like "Le provoca un tinto"? but certainly he couldn't have said, "Does red wine provoke you?"... so I just took a cup of coffee and said "Gracias".
>
> "We were in the waiting room for foreigners only five minutes when they opened the door to the aduana. I first had my health certificate checked, then my passport, and then went to the customs room to claim my

baggage and have it inspected. My baggage had not yet come in from the plane. I was worried about whether the customs would have any complaint about my prized portable record player. But I was lucky I guess. The inspector made me open both suitcases but he just poked around a bit in each and said, "Está bien!" I knew that the first thing I had to do was make a phone call to CEUCA to see what to do next. But there was not a phone in sight inside the *aduana*. I asked the porter, who by this time already had my bags on a hand cart, where I could make a phone call. He told me there were phones outside the door, he would show me. As soon as I spotted the line of phones on the wall I realized that they were pay phones and I had no Colombian coins. But I managed to borrow *veinte centavos* from the porter, but I tipped him five pesos later because he had to guard the baggage and wait for me. When I dialed CEUCA, I was surprised when the person answering the phone said "*A Ver*. *La Oficina de CEUCA*". I guess I expected to hear "*Bueno*"? as they say in Mexico instead of "*A Ver*"?

"Anyway, I talked to Dr. Martin at CEUCA and he said it would be easier for me, since it was getting late, to take a taxi directly from the airport to my Colombian family. So he gave me a lot of information about the family on the phone so that I would know their names and something about them when I arrived. He also called them to say I was arriving in a few minutes. I had already begun to worry about the whole idea of living by myself with a Colombian family. In Mexico there were three of us North Americans living with the family in Guanajuato.

"When I finished the phone call there was a line of people waiting behind me because two of the four phones were out of order, *dañado* as they say here. The man at the phone next to me asked me right in the middle of my conversation if he could borrow my *esfero* whatever that was. He got me all mixed up because at first I thought he was saying *espero*. Of course I knew he was waiting but what was I supposed to do about it! Later I realized that he wanted to borrow something but I did not know what. Anyway I didn't loan him anything and he seemed a bit irritated with me.

"The porter seemed to be happy that my phone call was over and he asked me if I wanted a cab. Eldorado airport was larger than I expected. We pushed our way through the crowd waiting to meet people coming on five different international flights that had all arrived very close together. It didn't take long to get a cab because there was a whole line of them waiting. By this time it was about 6:15 p.m. so I figured that this would be late enough to miss the worst of the traffic on a Tuesday in Bogotá.

"As soon as the cab left the airport, I started thinking what am I going to say to the family? Will I be able to understand their Spanish? Will they be able to understand mine? But I soon got my mind off that subject when we got into the edge of Bogotá. The taxi driver was a wildman. He was weaving in and out paying no attention to the lane lines. I swear that, when he saw pedestrians, he swerved to see if he could hit them before they could make it across the street.

"Well we finally jammed and jerked our way through this mess of traffic. I'd hate to see it at 5:15 instead of 6:15 p.m. He must have been trying to impress me with his machismo because he went through every stop sign except for the few where there were the traffic lights. The little signs saying pare on the post on the corner didn't seem to mean a thing to him. His car seemed to run on brakes and horn. Anytime someone stopped in front of him because of the traffic, he'd lean on the horn.

"It was starting to get dark and there was the craziest mixture of cows on the highway and neon signs. I was fascinated by the signs that I saw. Some were puzzling and some just plain funny. For example, there seemed to be a lot of bars or taverns called El Rancho. I saw several signs saying Rancho-Licores. But then I saw one saying 'Rancho-Licores y Víveres' and that threw me. One sign broke me up. In graceful blue neon script it said, 'Funeraria Gómez, Servicio Permanente.' Well, I was a bit tired but I had to laugh at the idea of a funeral parlor which advertises that it gives permanent service to its customers.

"We finally arrived at 7800 north which was a relief. I wasn't really sure we were going to make it all in one piece. As we pulled up in front of the house, I had the presence of mind to look at the taximeter which read 14.80 bright and clear. And since I already knew it was not a custom here to tip a cab driver, I was going to pay him an even 15 pesos. He wouldn't take it and jabbered something about the fare being 22 pesos. I told him that I saw the meter read 14.80 but he kept saying something about high taxes and poor people... so I gave him another five in order not to have a scene in front of the house just as I arrived. He unloaded the bags and sort of threw them on the sidewalks and went away mad. I guess he thought that any new gringo in town would be a pushover and maybe I was that first time. But I made up my mind that I was not going to let any taxi driver gyp me again!

"That was a moment I won't forget. After the taxi had left, there I was staring at the front door of the house. I was a bit confused because for some reason the house number was over the garage door and the porch light was on at the door on either side of the number. At first I couldn't tell which door went with what number. Luckily I picked the right.one. That 10 feet to the front door was like walking the plank. I still hadn't decided what to say or do when the door opened.

"When I knocked the maid opened the door and I asked, 'Es la casa de la familia Londoño,' and she said yes come in and then said to the señora who was upstairs that 'El estudiante norteamericano ya está aquí'. Before the señora could make it down the stairs, the two kids roared down and pounced on me wanting to help take my bags upstairs. Señora de Londoño stopped the commotion and introduced herself, and I was able to get out a 'Tanto gusto en conocerla' and called it good. I knew that there was a father, Enrique Londoño, but he was not on the scene. He wandered in about a half hour later while I was unpacking.

"In the meantime the señora de Londoño showed me around the house. First, she showed me the downstairs bathroom and said 'this is your bathroom'. Then she took me upstairs and showed me my bedroom which was just across the hall from the upstairs bathroom. It was clear that I was not supposed to use the bathroom across the hall but was supposed to hike downstairs. This being segregated didn't make me feel exactly like a member of the family. The downstairs bath was beautifully finished in tile all the way to the ceiling, but it was small; there was no bathtub nor even a separate shower stall. You could practically sit on the toilet and take a shower at the same time. There was a little problem of keeping the toilet paper dry if you took a shower.

"When she was showing me my bedroom in the front of the house on the second floor, she said that it was nice and warm in my room now 'porque hacía verano todo el día'. This threw me for a moment because I couldn't see how it could be verano (summer) in January. This was not Buenos Aires 'down under,' but Bogotá slightly above the equator. Then she said that this was a great improvement because last week it had been invierno (winter) all but one day. When I thought I heard that one, I knew my ear was not yet tuned in to the Bogotano Spanish. So I really don't know what she was trying to tell me about my room.

"Well finally I began unpacking, and the two boys were into everything asking what is this... then they saw my pressure-can of shave cream... and what is that. I just didn't have any privacy. I wanted to get a shower and rest a bit since it has been five hours since I left Miami, and I didn't have much sleep the night before.

"I didn't know whether the family had eaten yet. She did say 'Vamos a comer a las ocho'. So I wasn't sure that she was talking about dinner at 8:00 p.m. or breakfast at 8:00 a.m. If they had eaten, I was sunk!

"While I was unpacking, she came by the room to ask me if I planned to go out that night. How could I go out at that time of the night? I had just gotten there and I didn't know anywhere to go except for a walk down the street. I don't know what she had in mind.

"Somehow I realized from something one of the kids said that the Señora had meant that dinner was to be served at 8:00. That was great news! I saw there was no time to take a shower before then, but I went down to my bathroom to wash up as well as I could. There was no stopper in the lavatory so it was a bit inconvenient.

"I was introduced to Señor Londoño just before dinner was served, and he asked me a few questions about my trip. Dinner held some surprises. First, the food was not spicy or peppery as I had expected. I guess I thought the closer to the equator, the hotter the food, but this might not be a typical family or maybe they had special food for me. Also, as soon as the father was there the boys kept pretty quiet and had nothing to say. I sort of wished that they didn't give me so much attention, and so many questions put the conversational burden on me. Another thing was the table manners of the family! I'm no Emily Post, but I noticed that they all keep both hands, and sometimes elbows, on the table! I was surprised, not that I haven't seen people in the U.S. eat this way, but this family is very middle class and seem to have upperclass ideas about many things.

"There were a lot of little things that struck me as being different during those first 24 hours in my Colombian home. Just little things that confuse you. For example, the light switch for the bathroom is not in the bathroom, it is outside in the hall. They make the bed in a peculiar way. The top sheet and covers were not tucked in at the bottom. It really was cold in my bedroom by morning. When I was tossing around like I do at night, I almost lost all of the covers on the floor and my feet were sticking out.

"Another thing, it is very hard to find out when things happen in the household. For example, I wanted to be sure not to upset the household routine by not showing up for breakfast at the right time. So I asked Sra. de Londoño when breakfast was served. She said, 'It is served whenever you come down, any time you want it.' This didn't surprise me because I have heard that Latin Americans want to be polite to a guest, so I pressed her a little harder and said, "I can come down whenever the usual time is for breakfast," and she just said the same thing again, that breakfast would be served whenever I came downstairs in the morning. Well, I figured I'd tried, and if she didn't want to tell me or if she wanted to treat me like a guest in a hotel, that was her problem.

"Speaking of being a guest in a hotel, the maid brought me the orange juice in the morning! There was a knock at the door so I said siga, and in came the maid with a tray with a cup of coffee and a glass of orange juice. I felt sort of peculiar with the maid in my room, so when she plunked the glass and cup down on the night table beside my bed, what could I do but say "Gracias"? I realize now I should have said "Buenos Días" also when she entered. I really don't like to eat anything in bed in the morning, so I told Sra. de Londoño that I would come downstairs for my orange juice.

"At least I think I did one thing right the first day. I resisted the impulse to make my bed. Even though I didn't like the way the maid did it, I have heard that you must be careful not to interfere with the maid's usual functions because she might feel insecure as if you are trying to take over her job or something. So I just left the bed for the maid to make.

"When I went downstairs to breakfast it was a lonely scene. I was the only one down for breakfast. When the maid heard me coming down the stairs, she popped out of the kitchen to ask me what I wanted for breakfast. I asked what there was and she said, 'There are huevos pericos, fritos or tibios and either chocolate or café.' I was just a bit stumped by the pericos. It sounded like she said "parrot eggs, fried or poached" so I said, "fritos, por favor". As far as I could tell the eggs were simply fried chicken eggs like in the States except for the fact that they were sort of leathery on the bottom and seemed to be more oily than usual.

"Since I hadn't stopped at CEUCA the night before to get my orientation materials, I didn't yet have the bus routes to know how to get there. Also, I was a bit behind schedule to make the 9:00 a.m. session, so it was necessary to grab a cab. I was lucky to catch one very quickly. I remembered how the cab driver from the airport had gypped me but figured this guy was not so accustomed to foreigners on this route, so I didn't worry. But after we had gone a few blocks the driver asked, 'Subimos por la Avenida Chile?', and I thought he was crazy or I wasn't hearing the Spanish because subir means to get into a car or bus. He couldn't have said, 'Are you getting in at Avenida Chile?' because I was already in and headed north to our destination. Maybe he was saying, 'Did you get on at Avenida Chile?' just to see if I knew the city well enough to know where we were going. Then when we got there, I gave him the amount the meter said and he smiled very politely and said 65 centavos more please. I figured that he must have thought that this was a tip he deserved so I asked, 'Es para una propina?' He said that just covered the fare. I don't know the word for taximeter so I said, 'but that's what it said there,' pointing to the meter. He admitted that was correct but started talking very fast about how the taxi fares had changed or something... so I compromised and gave him 6.00 pesos when the meter read 5.60 instead of the 6.25 he wanted. I guess I really look more like a gringo that I thought.

"It was good to get to CEUCA and see that many of the others were in the same confused boat with me. I didn't go home for lunch the first day because it took until about 4:00 p.m. to finish up with the registration and preliminary red tape. It was a good thing too because by noon there was a bus strike so even though I had the information about buses, I couldn't have gotten home for lunch on a bus. And of course all the taxis were full because of the strike. But at 5:00 four of us were wanted to share a cab going north, and we actually found an empty one in a few minutes. We could see that it was a bargaining situation so we asked him how much he wanted to take us to Avenida Chile, that's at 7200 north, and Carrera 15. He wanted three pesos from each person. That would be 12 pesos for the trip. I didn't know enough Spanish to argue with him but in English I said, That's highway robbery. He's taking advantage of us just because it is a bus strike. So Jim, who knows more Spanish than I, talked to him and decided that we'd better pay what he asked if we wanted to get there. So I grudgingly went along. I guess by this time I had just had enough guff from taxi drivers, and I had been here less than 24 hours. The main reason people could get home that day was not because of the taxis but because just everybody driving a car would stop and pick up anybody they knew. I noticed that all of the cars were crammed full every where. Of course, a lot of people who didn't live too far away just walked.

"I got home at about 5:30 and again everything was quiet. The children weren't there I'm sure, and the Señor didn't get back from work until about 8:00. Finally, the whole family got together at about 8:30 for dinner. Much of the talk at the table was about the bus strike, and I told them the tale about the taxi driver robbing us for the trip. They seemed to be quite sympathetic about it all.

"There was a television show the parents wanted to see so they went to their room to watch it, and I saw no more of them that night. That was fine with me because I was still a bit tired from the trip and excitement and maybe getting used to the altitude. So I went to my room at about 9:15 and started reading some of the stuff they gave me.

> "There were hundreds of new things that hit me in that first 24 hours, but if I had to pick out the most important impressions, I guess there were three that stood out. First was the wild traffic. Second was my experience with the cheating taxi drivers, and third was the feeling that I had already been segregated in my Colombian home and they were treating me like a guest instead of a member of the family. It is too early to know how that angle is going to work out for me in this particular family. I'm sure they aren't an average Bogotano family!"

John's case and the subsequent discussion illustrate how the initial immersion in a culture registers a kaleidescope of impressions which are visual, auditory, linguistic and non-linguistic. The different aspects are so intertwined that the newcomer is not able to identify which type of barrier to communication is operating. Indeed, as this case shows, during his early immersion in the foreign culture, he is often not aware that there is any lack of communication. This is particularly true for the person who has some command of the language.

III. Discussion of John's Arrival in Bogotá

Even though John is a composite rather than a specific person, it is not possible to illustrate all of the difficulties encountered by different Americans we interviewed and still have a coherent story. Therefore, as we discuss John's case we will add related materials from the points of view of other specific Americans and occasionally introduce the Latin American viewpoint to show the contrasts between the two cultural patterns.

A. Linguistic factors.[1]

First we will deal with the Colombianismos John encountered upon arrival, then the localisms peculiar to Bogotá.

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[1] As we discuss John's arrival in Bogotá, we will point out both the linguistic and non-linguistic barriers which operated in this initial immersion process. In dealing with the linguistic problems we will not touch any of the basic core of the Spanish language but will confine ourselves to the Colombianismos and certain localisms (Bogotanismos) which relate to the particular situations in which John finds himself.

These are used merely to illustrate that such localisms do exist and that the newcomer cannot be expected to know these in advance; he must sensitize himself to pick up the most essential ones as quickly as possible.

1. Colombianismos. (a) *Le provoca un tinto*?: This phrase which occurs so frequently in the coffee-conscious culture of Colombia contains two Colombianismos. First, *le provoca* simply means "would you like?" According to standard dictionaries it has many possible meanings.[1] In this phrase it is used in the positive sense of excitement or interest.

Second, the word *tinto* in Spain, Mexico and several other countries refers to a deep red wine. But in Colombia it is heavy black coffee usually served in demi tasse cups. Thus, a phrase which could be literally interpreted to mean, "Does red wine offend you?" in some countries means nothing but "Would you like a cup of coffee?" In a more literal, but still correct way, the translation could be, "Does a cup of coffee interest you?"

(b) *A ver*: This Colombianismo is involved in practically every telephone call. The mode of responding when answering a telephone differs from one Latin American country to another.[2]

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[1] (1) to provoke, rouse, nettle; (2) to anger, enrage, offend; (3) to vomit; (4) to facilitate, promote; and (5) to move, excite.

[2] According to the embassies in Bogotá the following are the most common:

Argentina - hola
Bolivia - hola
Colombia - a ver
Chile - hola
Ecuador - aló
Mexico - bueno
Paraguay - hola
Perú - aló, buenos días
Spain - oigo, dígame
Uruguay - hola

(c) Esfero: John's reaction to hearing esfero[1] is typical in that, since he did not know the word, he automatically tried to distort what he heard to something he knew, which was espero. At first he thought the Colombian was impatiently saying "I'm waiting" (for the phone). Actually, the Colombian was asking to borrow his ballpoint pen.

(d) Rancho: In most places in Latin American rancho refers to a ranch or farm of some kind. In Colombia it is much more common to use the words finca or hacienda to refer to a farm. While rancho means either a rural farm house of a very simple type, or as in the sign Rancho y Licores, it means canned goods. Most stores with this sign are a type of delicatessen.

(e) Servicio permanente: When this phrase was applied to a mortician's establishment, John found it amusing as he interpreted it. However, permanente in this context does not mean eternal but merely "all day" or "open 24 hours per day." The same phrase could be applied to a gasoline station or police station.

(f) Hizo verano todo el día: In this context verano is a Colombianismo which refers to the current weather rather than to a season of the year.[2] If it is sunny and warm, it is verano, and if it is cloudy (and therefore cool), it is invierno. The daily weather forecast in the newspaper may simply read verano for the day.

(g) Huevos pericos: It is true that el perico is a small parrot found in the South American jungles. But if we were to mean parrot eggs we would have to say, "huevos de perica" with the preposition "de" and the feminine form of parrot. However, the interesting point here is that the listener is thrown off balance by the appearance of a word in a new and completely unexpected context, and therefore does not note that his best tentative interpretation does not make sense grammatically. Actually, huevos pericos are scrambled eggs. According to some informants this is because a scrambled egg has approximately the same proportion and shade of yellow and white as does the yellow parrakeet found in the Colombian jungle. At least this is a plausible possibility.

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[1] Esfero, from esfera meaning sphere, is a shortened form of esferográfico referring to "la pluma esferográfica," a ball point pen.

[2] Since, Colombia is near the equator, there are no seasonal changes in weather corresponding to winter (December, January and February) and summer (June, July, August). Instead, the changes in temperature are correlated with sunny and cloudy.

(h) Vamos a comer a las ocho: This phrase was very important to John since he was hungry, but he still was not certain whether the Señora was referring to dinner at 8:00 p.m. that night or to breakfast the next morning. To the Señora it was not necessary to specify 8:00 "at night" or "in the morning" because this was already made clear in the Colombian use of the word comer. John interpreted this to simply mean to eat, when in Colombia it means "to eat dinner." Desayunar is to eat breakfast and almorzar is to eat lunch.

2. Localismos. Here we will give only one localism which is unique to Bogotá to illustrate the general idea that probably every city develops a special universe of discourse, or a specialized vocabulary. Often, as in this example, the special words have a unique meaning because of some peculiar physical, geographical or climatic condition.

Subimos por la Avenida Chile? John was right in saying that subir is used in the sense of getting into a car or bus. Since he did know enough about the local setting to know they were still heading toward Avenida Chile, he knew that he did not get on there.[1] What the driver was actually asking was,

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[1] The use of this word in this manner jolted him so that he did not notice in his trial translations of the sentence that subir was used in the first person plural, rather than the third person, singular. Therefore the driver could not have been referring to any act of the passenger which excluded himself.

"Are we going to turn up (east) on Avenida Chile (or later perhaps on Calle 76)?" In Bógotá to go east is to "go uphill" and to go west is to "go downhill." This is actually the case for the portion of the city very near the mountain, but the phrase is still used out near the National University where the streets in all directions are practically level. This localism is equivalent to the Chicagoan saying "toward the lake" for east and "away from the lake" for west. But the Bogotano localism is less obvious to the North American.

The above Colombianismos and Bogotanismos should sensitize us to the general linguistic fact that even though there is a basic core of syntax and grammar which is practically universal in the Spanish speaking world, there is a rich variation in vocabulary and usage as we move from country to country and region to region. The person with the best command of basic Spanish is the first to detect the localisms. Also it is important to note that the more one knows about the non-linguistic cultural context, the quicker he is able to detect and make sense out of the localism.

B. Non-linguistic factors.

1. At 16:15 o'clock. Although John apparently understood, some Americans are confused when the time is given according to a 24-hour clock. For this to become meaningful the linguistic translation to "at 16:15 o'clock" is not enough. It is usually convenient for the American at first to simply think in terms of anything up to 12:00 a.m. and from 12:01 to 24:00 as p.m. after subtracting 12. However, in much of Latin American both the 12-hour and the 24-hour clock are used. The 24-hour system is more common in the schedule for all modes of transportation, and the a.m.-p.m. system is used for all other purposes.

2. The temperature in Bogotá is 19 degrees. Of course the assumption of the Avianca pilot is that, since he is speaking Spanish, he should report the temperature in centigrade, and he may or may not specify centígrado. If the stewardess translates

the announcement into English for the benefit of the American tourists, she would say, "It is 64 degrees in Bogotá," and may or may not specify farenheit.

This question of farenheit versus centigrade becomes a practical problem for any person traveling in Latin American countries. It could very well be 20 degrees farenheit in Punta Arenas on the same day that it is 20 degrees centigrade (68 degrees farenheit) in Bogotá.

Since the Latin Americans are consistent in their use of the centigrade system, it is well for the North American to become familiar with it in a functional way.[1]

3. About 6:15 p.m. we should miss the traffic. Often Americans from big cities expect the heaviest afternoon traffic to be between 4:30 and 6:00 since most downtown offices would close between 4:00 and 5:00. This is based on the pattern of a 35 or 40 hours week of five days. In Bogotá the rush is from about 5:30 to 7:30 because most office staff work 48 hours per week, including Saturday mornings. A typical day would be 4½ hours before lunch, a two-hour lunch period, and then four more hours in the afternoon, a total of 10½ hours elapsed time. Thus if the day begins at 7:30, it ends at 6:00 p.m. It could run from 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., or 8:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with an additional 5 hours work on Saturday.

As a result of the American's lack of understanding of this different daily and weekly rhythm, he can draw many erroneous conclusions from his observations:

> "Here it isn't like the United States where there is rush hour traffic only at certain times of the day. Here, there is always a traffic rush. I don't know where everybody is going all the time!"

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[1] It is helpful to have a few equivalents in mind to facilitate this translation. For example:

Centigrade	0[e]	5	10[e]	15	20	25	35[e]	100[e]
Farenheit	32[e]	40	50[e]	60	70	80	95[e]	212[e]

[e] These equivalents are exact while the others are approximate within less than 2 degrees centigrade.

OR

> "Boston subways have rush hours but here it's 12 hours a day. Like today I was waiting for the bus at the bus stop (paradero) and the two buses I needed went right by. I thought, 'Damn it, another one isn't going to get by me!' So when one tried to get by because it was full, I sprinted as fast as I could and jumped for the railing. I managed to get one foothold on the step and so I got that bus. But yesterday I went ten blocks on the running board. By the time I got to the turnstile, it was time to get off, but I had gone five blocks past my stop before I could push and shove my way to the back door to get off. And this happens to me when I wait as long as I can to avoid the heavy traffic and still make it home for the comida."

Remarks of this kind in interviews with the North Americans gave us clues to a general problem which any foreigner has at first in the host culture. He is often exerting tremendous effort because he is out of step with the cultural rhythm. Even though his own personal schedule would often allow him to avoid the congestion and rush which the Bogotano office worker must tolerate, in his very attempt to avoid the rush he hits it dead center. This is clearly indicated in the second person's reactions given above. He was free from his last class at CEUCA at 4:45 and could catch a bus for his home. But in order to avoid the five o'clock rush, a North American concept, he actually encountered worse conditions on the buses by waiting until later.

One of the first problems which must be solved in the early period of adapting to a foreign culture is to discover the differences in the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms. One can be so busy trying to keep in step with his own culture and solving the problems he is causing himself, that the time needed to discover the new rhythmic pattern is prolonged. This theme of being out of step recurs frequently in the early period of adjustment.

4. Wild drivers don't observe lane lines. Nearly every American interviewed early in his stay in Bogotá remarked with

considerable feeling regarding the "wild driving" in Bogotá. They marvel that there are not many more accidents than there are. Everywhere they see another narrow escape by a bus, taxi, car, pedestrian or animal. John's sentiments about the lack of respect for lane lines are shared by many Americans, yet there are practically no lane lines painted on the streets of Bogotá.

In one case the interviewer challenged the respondent by saying that there were no lane lines painted on the particular avenue where he "saw" them. The respondent was so sure that he had in fact seen white lane lines that he insisted on taking the interviewer to that location only to be embarrassed by the apparent disappearance of the lines. This somewhat accidental discovery is an excellent example of how we all tend to bring the frames of reference of our past experience to bear upon the solution of current problems. In this case the white lines existed in the head of the American.

It is equally important to realize that the simple physical act of painting lines on the streets of Bogotá for the first time would not suddenly obtain conformity from the drivers. It would take time for the lines to become functionally impressed upon the mind of the Colombian drivers. Putting the lines on the street could be part of the means of getting the lines in the heads of the Colombians, but if these lines are at odds with the basic assumptions regarding the nature of driving, the lines may never take effect.

To the North American the traffic consists of not only visual chaos but also auditory chaos. The American who is a careful and sympathetic observer can detect functional value in only a small proportion of the horn blowing which is so prevalent in Bogotá, as it is in many Latin American cities. Americans find the horn tooting objectionable even while they are passengers or pedestrians, and the irritation increases if they are driving. Here is a typical view of an American.

> "The thing that bothers me most... it's probably foolish to be bothered by it... is the horns.

> Everybody leans on his horn when he comes to a blind intersection, you don't stop and look. No! About 25 yards from the intersection you lean on your horn and blast your way through. I've always assumed and I've always been taught that you use your horn as a last resort to get attention. But I swear the Colombians like the sound of their horns, they keep leaning on them. Like when crossing a street I hear a horn and it means there's something wrong, but here horns are going all the time and it bothers me."

Another basic aspect of the Colombian traffic which bothers the American is his feeling that near-accidents are happening almost constantly. He keeps waiting to hear the inevitable crash of cars or the thud as a jay-walker is bowled over.

(a) "It's not just the taxies but the buses bother me too. Personally, I'd rather have a mild uneventful ride but the buses seem like they are weaving in and out and coming closer to having an accident than even my one taxi ride did."

(b) "I'd swear that the taxi drivers, as soon as they see a pedestrian, try to see how close they can come to them. The pedestrian in his own way seems to be acting as stubbornly as possible and will not hurry in the slightest to keep from getting hit. He just gives the driver a deadpan look or doesn't even look at him at all. To the driver it doesn't matter whether the pedestrian is crossing in the middle of the block or at the corner, they all get treated alike."

(c) "One time my taxi was turning the corner on Avenida Chile and a well-dressed, matronly woman was crossing in the crosswalk. The taxi tried to crowd her off the street, and instead of hurrying she stopped dead in her tracks and the taxi slammed on the brakes and almost threw me into the front seat. The Señora just glared at him and stood there until she was good and ready to cross."

(d) "I have been able to adapt to this idea fairly well as far as walking across the middle of the block and dodging traffic. It seems somewhat exciting. On the bus you see someone leading a goat across the street and you wonder whether they are going to make it out of the way before the bus picks up that goat on the bumper, but they always make it."

These four examples are typical American impressions of the traffic situation in Bogotá. Colombians who witness the same types of event repeatedly do not report them as near disasters. Thus, again we find that the same observations by members of two different cultures lead to different conclusions, because different assumptions are used as the criteria for interpreting the event. All of the above conclusions are based upon an assumption regarding the appropriate distance to be allowed between people for the sake of physical safety.

The concept of margin of safety varies from culture to culture just as do the intimate, personal, social, and public distances as pointed out by Edward T. Hall.[1] The American tends to leave a much larger margin of safety than does the Colombian. The Colombian pedestrian who has plenty of time to cross the street in the middle of the block will pace himself so that the on-coming car will miss him by less than a yard. In contrast the American will want to have at least a full car width (two yards) and would feel more comfortable if he were already on the sidewalk when the car crossed his wake.

The point which is theoretically fascinating and necessary for the practical art of survival is that this margin of safety, which is a physically measurable distance, is the outward manifestation of a culture pattern. The pattern consists of (a) a set of mutually shared expectations, which are generally unconscious, regarding (b) the approximate distances which should be allowed between moving objects depending upon the nature of the objects and their relative speeds or directions.

If the expectations are shared by all involved in the traffic flow, accidents will be minimized. If these definitions are not shared, then a dangerous situation exists. The American cannot assume that he can make up for the "wild behavior" of the Colombians by simply increasing his usual margin of safety. In some cases this might work from the purely safety point of view, but it would make it impossible for an American to get his car out of a parking place or to walk across the street. For hours no break may occur in the traffic large enough to allow a safe maneuver according to the American criterion.

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[1] Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966, chapter X, XI and XII.

In other situations it is clearly dangerous for the American to allow a wide margin of safety. In trying to keep a larger distance between himself and a vehicle, he may be forced to swerve away from the apparently threatening object, only to bring himself directly into the path of another car. In this case the American would consider the accident to be the fault of the first car, but the Colombians would consider it the fault of a jumpy, erratic, unpredicable American. Just as the person who cautiously drives too slowly onto an American freeway is a menace, so is the person in Bogotá who tries to keep a margin of safety three to five times as great as that which is expected. The American pedestrian who crosses midblock on a busy thoroughfare to imitate the Colombians must be sure that he does not let a near-miss panic him into disaster.

There are also differences in the assumptions about using brakes. The American tries his best to drive in such a way that, if the other cars were to continue at a constant speed and direction, they will not have to put on their brakes to avoid him if he is crossing an intersection, changing lanes, making a lefthand turn, or entering the traffic flow from a parking place. Also, the American driver considers the frequent use of the brakes (four or five times in a block of traffic) either a symptom of short-sightedness on the part of the driver or imprudence on the part of others he is trying to avoid. It is clear that the Colombian driver feels that brakes are to be used frequently in the normal course of driving.

The American driver also tries to "read the traffic" farther ahead than does the Colombian. Frequently the American passenger in a car being driven by a Colombian notices problems much farther ahead than does the Colombian. For example:

> "I have ridden a taxi over the same route in Bogotá at least 100 times and I have noticed that the driver sees the situation a lot different from the way I do when I drive. Dozens of times a taxi has been so absorbed in trying to pass the car immediately ahead that he doesn't notice that in doing so he will end up right behind the bus which has stopped to pick up passengers. The driver would have actually saved time if he had stayed in the lane where he was."

OR

> "I have seen it many times. The cab will roar up to an intersection where there is obviously an obstruction of some sort like a utility repair truck working in the center of an intersection. He stops so close to the car ahead that he can't pull around it to get through, and he can't back up because the car behind has done the same thing. So they all sit there in the traps they have laid for themselves and toot their horn as if by some magic they could make the obstruction disappear."

On the other hand the Colombian driver seems to be more alert to events at closer range which are totally unexpected by the American. For example:

> "Several times I have really been amazed at the the quick action of the taxi driver. For example, one time a little boy on a zorra (a low home-made cart with auto bearings as wheels) darted out from a parking lot with a load of groceries. I didn't even see the kid until after the driver slammed on the brakes. The boy came from side away from the driver and his head couldn't have been over 2½ feet from the ground. If I had been driving, I would have either hit him or swung out into the other lane and caused a big crash. I was busy looking farther ahead. Once you are within 10 feet of a driveway coming out of the Carulla parking lot, you aren't still expecting something to come barreling out in front of you."

These last three typical reactions of Americans seem to indicate that there is a different range of vigilance adapted to the two different cultural patterns of driving. If we grant that there is a general human limit to the field which a person can be continuously scanning, then this scanning field must include that area in which the relevant events are statistically most likely to happen. In any forward moving vehicle the scanning field is mostly directly forward but may vary in depth of focus and in the forward point at which it begins. It seems that the Colombians depth of focus may be the same, but it appears to most Americans that it begins closer to the front of the car and ends sooner than does the American's.

So far we have pointed out what seem to be four differences in the assumptions of Americans and Colombians regarding the movement of traffic and a fifth assumption has been implicit in several of the examples.

	AMERICAN	COLOMBIAN
(1)	Use traffic lanes: Traffic should be confined to lanes and should signal any intention to change from one lane to another. You should respect the idea of lanes even when they are not visible.	Traffic lanes are straight jackets: Traffic should be free-flowing and not be bound by the idea of lanes, even if they are painted on the street.
(2)	Wider margin of safety: A wide margin of safety should be maintained at all times. Here "wide" in some circumstances may be two to ten times the Colombian distance.	Narrower margin of safety: Some margin of safety must be maintained, but accidents are avoided only by active vigilance, not by creating a comfortable cushion of distance.
(3)	Use brakes sparingly: You should avoid using your brakes or forcing the other person to use his by thinking ahead as much as possible.	Brakes are to be used: You must be constantly vigilant so that you can use your brakes and horn as a preventive measure to avoid collisions. That is what brakes and horns are for.

	AMERICAN	COLOMBIAN
(4)	**Scanning range farther out**: The driver must read the traffic far ahead so he will not be caught by surprise.	**Scanning range closer in**: You can't possibly read the traffic very far ahead because people's movements are too fluid, so watch that range where it is possible to know what is going to happen.
(5)	**Pedestrians in crosswalks**: Jaywalking is usually illegal and at best very risky. Drivers usually do not expect jaywalkers.	**Pedestrians cross where convenient**: Where to cross a street is a matter of personal judgment. Often it is safer to cross in the middle of the block because traffic can be moving only in two directions and is easier to watch.

The combined application of these and perhaps other assumptions in the traffic behavior of Colombians produces a pattern which at first may be quite frightening to the American. For example:

> "The thing that still scares me a bit is the way the taxi, when approaching a stop light, will go on the wrong side of the street to pass the two lanes of waiting cars in order to get ahead. Of course when the signal changes, he is facing the lane of on-coming traffic, but he always guns out to cut in front of the lane going his way in order to get on the right side of the street again before meeting the on-coming cars. Sometimes before the light changes, the cars making turns are blocked by him. I guess it's not against the law to do this, because I have seen it happens with a policeman standing in the center of the intersection."

OR

> "I'll bet it has happened a hundred times to me personally. The bus or taxi will start to pass someone in the center lane, and while he is on the wrong side of the street, here comes another car head on, and we are approaching an intersection. Anything could happen but it never does. I'll knock on wood when I say that. I would expect the on-coming driver to be angry and shout something at the driver who is on the

> wrong side of the street but that hasn't happened either. It's a bit like the old game of chicken to see who can stay on the collision course the longest."

It is interesting to compare these comments of Americans with those of one Latin American who has lived in the United States for several years. He too sees differences in the overt behavior and goes further to indicate what he considers to be the differences in the underlying assumptions.

> "(For the American) the green light means 'go' and the red light means 'stop.' It is different with the Latin American driver. For him the traffic rules are subject to elastic individual interpretations... The red light can mean a good opportunity to violate the traffic law or maybe it can mean 'stop.' The green light is undoubtedly the best.
>
> "In the United States driving an automobile has been converted into an essentially automatic act. The North American is persuaded that it is only necessary to follow the traffic rules and there will be no accidents. The Latin American is not only watching his own driving but also the movements of the other people who probably will not be following the traffic rules. Confronted by an unexpected situation, or another driver's error, the Latin American prepared in advance reacts immediately to avoid disastrous consequences. Not so with the North American, who, confronted with a similar situation, continues driving the same way or puts the brakes on suddenly thus causing the accident. It is for this reason that in the United States the automobile accidents undoubtedly result in an orderly pile of cars, one behind the other, completely wrecked.
>
> "In our countries the North American driver attracts attention because he is the only one who assumes that the red light always means stop and that the green light always represents an authorization to proceed. He has faith that the other driver will carry out the traffic rules as strictly as he. Finally, the lack of the signs and signals to which he is accustomed makes him the only one who gets into the ruts in the street and who drives into blind streets. Thus, the

> unadaptive behavior of the North American who travels abroad shows even in driving an automobile."[1]

It is clear from the writings of Márquez and the many talks I have had with Latin Americans, that the North American is viewed as less individualistic and more of an automaton than the Latin American. What the North American considers to be orderly, efficient and equitable, the Latin American considers to be dehumanized behavior. They also see this contrast in the comparison of the Latin American variety of fútbol and the North American football which Márquez wittily points to as actually a form of "handball" since the ball is rarely kicked. To the Latin American the complicated teamwork with the clockwork synchronization found in American football is an example of the complete surrender of individuality to the point where each person becomes a cog in a machine. Latin Americans sometimes characterize their driving habits also as more individualistic and worthy of intelligent beings.

In case we have lead the reader astray, we began this whole discussion of cultural differences in traffic patterns as an explanatory elaboration of one of observations made by our composite American, John Seymour, upon arriving in Bogotá.

5. The taxi driver tried to cheat me! This initial suspicion which John had on his first taxi ride from the airport was fortified by two subsequent experiences with cab drivers. The first two encounters were misunderstandings based upon the American's assumption that in all cases the passenger is supposed to pay the amount indicated on the taxi meter and on the Colombian's assumption that the American knows about the exceptions.

In the ride from the airport there is a special tax of eight pesos added to the regular fare. The driver might have assumed that the American knew this even though he had just arrived in the country because the passenger is always given an explanatory coupon at the exit from the airport. In the second case the driver charged 65 centavos more than the meter indicated because the government had just allowed an increase of 65 centavos (about 4 cents) per passenger. However, each time the officials authorize an increase in the base taxi rate, it may take weeks for all of the taxis to have their meters regulated at the bonded taximeter repair shops. This cannot, for obvious reasons, be done by the driver himself since the meter has been officially sealed and it is illegal to break the seal. In this case the driver did not expect the North American passenger to know this, so he tried to explain, but John was not in a mood to accept his explanation.

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[1] Jairo Márquez, Anatomía del Gringo, Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1966, pp. 27-29.

In the third experience, the bus strike causing a tremendous imbalance of supply and demand would provide the taxi drivers with an excellent opportunity to overcharge the footweary passenger. John assumed, since the driver was not charging regular rates according to the meter, that he would charge outlandish prices. He was prepared to shout, "highway robbery." If John had been in a more rational mood, he would have realized that a 44 block ride for three pesos (18.4 cents) was a bargain even in Colombia because this same route on a day without a bus strike would have cost a single passenger five pesos by the meter. Of course, it is true that extra passengers would ordinarily incur no extra charge. But it is also true that this group of passengers willing to share a cab would not ordinarily have been together.

This series of taxi incidents illustrates how cross-cultural miscommunication can become compounded. The false premise in situation "A" lead to a false conclusion, that "all cab drivers are dishonest opportunists. This then became the assumption to interpret the cab driver's behavior in situation "B," which then lead to a new false conclusion. This conclusion reinforced the old assumption, which in turn became the basis for communication in situation "C."

The problem is further compoundedby the fact that (a) some taxi drivers do try to cheat the passenger, and that (b) some drivers are more likely to try cheat any foreigner. Taxi drivers often argue the foreigner won't know the difference, he can afford it, and in some cases the driver hopes to "get even" because some of these people have cheated him in the past, as John did in the case of the first and second rides described above.

Thus exists the potent possibility for a vicious circle of cross-cultural mis-communication and conflict based upon strong in-group-outgroup attitudes. This makes it difficult for individuals on either side of the cultural fence to treat each case rationally and to see each person as an individual not responsible for the sins of all his kind but only for his own actions.

6. They don't treat me like a member of the family! From the very beginning John began to think that he was being segregated from the family because he had to use the downstairs bathroom. This bathroom is usually known as "el baño de emergencia" in the Bogotano home. John seemed to assume that it would be more convenient for him if he were allowed to use the upstairs bathroom. Actually this would be most incovenient for him since there were three male members and one female member of the family to use the one upstairs bathroom in the morning. It is customary for most Colombians to bathe in the morning, and since the two boys leave for their colegio at about the same time the father would leave for work and that John would leave for class, there would be considerable congestion and delay in getting access to the bathroom in the mornings. Also, John is in fact not a member of the family, and they would feel that he should have the bathroom to himself while the father and two sons would be likely to share the bathroom. Given these cultural facts, the only alternatives which would be more convenient for John would be to give him priority in using the upstairs bathroom, or to restrict family members to using the downstairs bathroom.

Of course John would not expect or want this if he knew the alternatives. Yet he vaguely feels that he should not be segregated by requiring him to use the baño de emergencia. The word "segregated" suggests that he felt separate and subordinate; some of his interpretations of his observations conspired to support this feeling.

At first he thought that the lack of a bathtub was significant. Actually there was none upstairs either. In fact bathtubs were found in only 16% of the host family homes. This is not a matter of being unable to afford one; they are not considered necessary. Some people think of bathing in a tub as a filthy habit not worthy of civilized people, to be clean people should bathe only in running water.

The running-water-for-cleanliness hypotheses is consistent with several other observations. For example, while only 16% of the host families have bathtubs, over 60% have a bidet. Also, stoppers are often missing from sinks and lavatories unless they are built in, and not all plumbing shops sell them. It is also the Americans' impression that a great majority of the maids wash dishes without benefit of either sink stopper or dish pan, since dishes to be clean also need running water. At any rate we can dismiss the assumption that the absence of a bathtub and sink stopper in John's bathroom is any indication of an underprivileged position.

Another observation which made him feel segregated was the fact that he found himself eating breakfast alone. To compound the feeling, he had asked Señora de Londoño when breakfast was served, and to him her answer sounded evasive; he has "heard how Latin Americans want to be polite to a guest." John is right about the difficulties that Americans sometimes have in obtaining a frank answer from the Latin American, but this holds only under certain conditions which do not apply to this particular case. Actually, the Señora was giving a correct and precise answer when she said that "breakfast is served whenever you come down... anytime you want it." The American finds this unbelievable because he assumed incorrectly that the whole family is going to eat breakfast together.

Nothing could be further from the Bogotano culture pattern.[1] Interviews with 75 American guests showed that 64% of them ate breakfast alone. Many of these seemed to assume that the family all ate together at some other time, but this was only rarely the case.

On the other hand an American sometimes feels that in some ways he is treated as special, privileged guest. For example, he assumes that the lack of spicy (picante) foods at the dinner table is a special concession to him as a North American. This sort of thing does happen in Mexico where picante foods are more common, but in Bogotá it is difficult to find any red pepper or black pepper, and a common complaint of Americans is that the food is often "tasteless" or "too salty."

Similarly, because orange juice or coffee is brought to his bedroom in the morning, the American may feel that he is being given special treatment. In fact this is quite common and in some cases the father, or more likely the mother, will eat her entire breakfast in the bedroom. To John having a maid bring orange juice makes it like a hotel. So here when John is being treated like a member of the family according to the Colombian pattern, he thinks he is treated as a special guest.

It is interesting to note that the Americans are quite human in wanting to have their cake and eat it too when cutting out a role for themselves, usually euphemistically referred to as "being a real member of the family." This is dealt with exclusively in another unit of materials, but the problem is foreshadowed here in John's arrival in Bogotá when he with unconscious ambivalence wants to be more like a member of the family on the one hand, but in other ways does not want to act like or accept the role of a real family member. Here are some of the ways in which John was rejecting the very family of which he thought he wanted to be a member.

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[1] The pattern at breakfast and other meals is dealt with more extensively later in the next case study.

7. I didn't have any privacy! This is a common cry of the foreign student living with a host family. The two boys in the family who were "helping" him with his unpacking were merely a nuisance to him, and he only wanted to escape them. Yet this might have been quite typical of the way they would have behaved toward an older brother returning from a trip to the United States. In a sense his ambivalence could be expressed in "It's good to be a member of the family if you don't have to put up with any little brothers."

8. I should have said 'Buenos días' to the maid. It is not surprising that John had not yet acquired the reflex of greeting anyone who enters the room before conversing about any problem at hand. So when he did not say "Buenos días" but only "gracias," as he fully realized later, he was violating the norms of the family group. Also he felt uncomfortable about the maid coming to deliver the juice to his bedroom, so he preferred to do it his way and go downstairs for his morning juice. Again he was deviating from the pattern of this particular family.

9. I resisted the impulse to make my bed. In the U.S. it is typical for Americans to make their own beds unless they are in an upper class home or in a hotel. The interesting point here is that John would have gladly made his bed himself in order to be a member of the family, but he does not because he has heard that you must be careful not to do the maid's work. Unfortunately, it is not that simple.[1] In this particular family with one young maid, it would have been better if the American guest were to make his own bed. The idea of not interferring with the maid's functions applies much more uniformly to the area of the kitchen.

10. They keep both hands on the table. John was brought up in a family where it was not considered polite to have both

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[1] In our interviews with 44 Colombian señoras, 17 expected students to make their own beds, 15 did not, while 12 said it depends on circumstances in the home.

hands above the table except, when both are needed, for example, to cut a piece of meat. In interpreting this small sample of Colombian behavior in terms of his own middleclass American assumption regarding the proper way to eat, John never thought that a Colombian would be disturbed by his missing hand. A Colombian eating at an American table wonders about the tendancy to keep one hand out of sight.

> "I used to have an undefined, uncomfortable sensation every time I sat at the table to eat with Americans. What bothered me, I realized later, was their custom of keeping their free hand under the table while eating. In Colombia this is bad manners."[1]

Thus we see that an American tends to draw certain conclusions about the manners of the Colombians and the Colombians draw conclusions about the manners of the Americans, both by the same process of unconsciously applying his own cultural frame of reference in interpreting the other's behavior.

An important point to keep in mind is that cultural differences may strike the observer as interesting and exotic, or they may cause strong negative reactions. This negative value-judgment is most likely to occur under the following conditions:

(a) when the foreigner being observed does something which actually happens in the observer's own culture, and

(b) when in the observer's culture the action is not appropriate under the circumstances, or

(c) if the action is usually done by "bad" or lower status people in the observer's own culture.

Keeping these principles in mind we can understand why it would be acceptable for an African visitor to the White House to wear a turquoise silk turban, white toga and sandals, but not a checkered sportshirt, walking shorts and tennis shoes.

Perhaps more to the point, the señora in the Colombian host family is greatly embarrassed if her gringa guest is seen walking alone on Avenida Jiménez at 9:30 p.m. She is not embarrassed because she has never seen such behavior by Colombians, but precisely because she has seen Colombian prostitutes doing this.

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[1] Enrique Vargas, "The Jet-Age Malady," Saturday Review, May 29, 1965, pp. 18-19.

C. Summary of "John's Arrival in Bogotá"

John's initial 24-hour encounter with the Colombian culture illustrates some of the typical barriers to communication which are encountered by North Americans. There was no attempt to exhaust the catalog of potential barriers, but to cover some of the most salient, and at the same time illustrate several types of barriers.

Under the heading of linguistic barriers we dealt only with some of the deviations from standard Spanish which were either Colombianismos or Bogotanismos. A selected list of commonly used Colombianismos is given in Appendix A of this unit.

Among the non-linguistic barriers encountered very early in the American's stay in Colombia, we dealt with a few most frequently encountered. They ranged from the simple and partially familiar, like the 24-hour clock and the centigrade thermometer, through differences in rush-hour traffic, driving customs, and taxi fares, to the early treatment of the American guest by the host family which is unfamiliar and complex in comparison with the 24-hour clock.

John met the types of barriers which would be encountered by any North American in his first few hours in Latin America. The next case study focuses more exclusively on the American's early reactions to family life in Colombia.

IV. A Case-Incident: Family or Boarding House?

The GLCA[1] Center in Bogotá, Colombia has a program of studies for undergraduate students from the GLCA colleges and for Peace Corps Trainees planning to work in Colombia.

The following case shows how a North American who was expecting to be placed in a Colombian family began to feel that an error had been made and that he had been placed in a boarding house by mistake. A few of the GLCA students and Peace Corps Trainees living with Colombian families would complain after two or three days that they were not in a "real family" but in a commercial or semi-commercial boarding house. Such an error was possible in placing over 100 North Americans in Bogotano homes because a family might convert their home into a more lucrative boarding house after it had been investigated by the housing coordinator at CEUCA or after the previous CEUCA student had lived there.

In the interview which follows, Robert, the American student had been in Bogotá for four days. He had been thinking about going to the Director of CEUCA with his problem but had not yet done so. Here is the situation as seen by the student and told to the interviewer.

S:[2] "I have a little problem which is very important to me, but I know you are not the one I should bring it to."

I: "What is that?"

S: "I have been living in this house where they put me for three days now... and it is not what I expected. The brochure and my academic advisor at my home college made a big thing of living with a Colombian family while I studied down here. I thought for sure that is where I would be placed... in a private family!"

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[1] The GLCA is the Great Lakes Colleges Association which administers the study center known locally in Bogotá as CEUCA (pronounced SAY-oo-kah) the acronym for Centro de Estudios Universitarios Colombo-Americano.

[2] S= the student (Robert) and I= the interviewer.

I: "Yes, that is what I assumed they did..."

S: "But, that is not what happened. I'm not with a private family!"

I: "Oh! Where are you living?"

S: "It's actually a boarding house for students! A pension."

I: "Really! Where is it located?"

S: "It's on Carrera 14A, number 82-31."

I: "When did you first discover that, you were in a boarding house?"

S: "It looked that way to me the first day, but I wasn't too sure. By the second day there was no doubt in my mind. Some of the guys living there took me out to see the town the second night I was there. We just walked around and looked at the shops and things. Everybody in the house seems to come and go as they please... so I thought maybe I would have more freedom than I would in a private home where I hear that they watch you very closely. But I don't particularly care for this boarding-house food and I can see that I'm not going to get much attention there now that I am not a novelty any more."

I: "Are you sure you're really in a boarding house?"

S: "As sure as I'm talking to you! I was amazed myself!"

I: "How did you first know that it was a boarding house rather than a private family?"

S: "The first clue was when I noticed that there were seven young people about my age living there, and I know that five of them at least go to different universities here in Bogotá... then I realized that it was a boarding house for students. It is run by a little old couple who lives in a sort of apartment on the side. I think it is an old duplex converted into one house."

I: "But is it possible that these older people are actually the parents, even though they might seem a bit too old to you?"

S: "Right! I thought of that at first, but then discovered that they all had different names!"

I: "How did you discover that?"

S: "It was just accidental because when I was introduced to the woman when I first arrived, I didn't get her name straight. The man was usually not around; but the first time he was there one of the boys introduced me to him and I got his name straight and wrote it down right away so that I wouldn't forget it. He is Señor Álvaro Bernardino. The second day I was there when a telegram came and one of the boys signed for it. It was addressed to Hilda Nieves Contreras. No wonder I couldn't remember her name! When the Señora of the house returned from the market the boy gave it to her. She opened it and was very happy because she said it was birthday greetings from an old girl friend she had not heard from for years. I wasn't too surprised when the names didn't fit because I've heard that there is a lot of common-law marriage in Colombia. So maybe that is the situation. But I'm not even sure they live together."

I: "What else made you sure it was a boarding house?"

S: "Well, right away I noticed that the students addressed the older couple as "m'am" and "sir," that is... Señora and Señor."

I: "Anything else?"

S: "There were lots of things that all added up to a pretty clear picture even though no one thing was too conclusive." (Pause)

I: "For example."

S: "Oh yes, not all of the students even had the same last names. I can only remember three of the boys names right now. There is Carlos Bernardino Rodríguez... at first I thought he was the old man's son, since they are both named Bernardino, but Carlos told me that his father is now living in Tunja. Another boy is José Contreras Moreno who doesn't happen to be the son of Hilda Nieves Contreras. I asked him about this directly and he said, "No, I'm not her son. I come from Tunja too." He sort of smiled when he said this. I guess Tunja is a small town far away from Bogotá. Carlos is a law student at Nacional and José is a pre-med student at the Universidad Javeriana. Then the third one I know for sure is Daniel Bernardino Contreras who is studying to be an architect. I'm not sure where. I don't know who he is related to. Bernardino is probably another name like Moreno. There are probably 10,000 of them in Bogotá. So there are still four of the students whose full names I don't know. They are María, Beatriz, Armando and Arturo."

I: "How does this boarding house impress you?"

S: "Well, as I mentioned before, there is quite a bit of freedom which I didn't expect. Nobody cares when you come or go. Even though we all eat at one big table, everybody is never there at the same time.

Even at breakfast there are never more than three people eating at once; and I know that there are at least 10 people counting me, plus the maids. I think there is a maid and a cook both. Anytime you want breakfast you just come downstairs and tell Inés, the maid, that you are ready to eat. Carlos and José eat at the same time I do at breakfast; I guess that is because we all have eight o'clock classes. But we all charge off in different directions on different buses."

I: "What else have you learned about the house?"

S: "Another thing that bugs me just a bit... is that nobody seems to trust anyone else. For example, each student has his own room and when he leaves for the day he locks it with a key. Even worse than that, the refrigerator door is locked after dinner. I discovered this when I went to the kitchen at about 10 at night to get some water to take a Gelusil pill and the thing was locked up as tight as a drum! Of course they would most likely do the same thing in a boarding house in the States too. I don't know because I have just lived at home and in a college dormitory."

I: "I would suggest that you tell the Director of CEUCA about your situation. I'm sure they intended to put you in a private family. It is amazing that this could happen. I can't mention this to the Director since these interviews are confidential, but you can go directly to either the Director or the Student advisor."

S: "Well, I have thought of that but maybe I should let well enough alone. They don't bug me about anything. They don't ask where I am going or when I'll be back."

I: "They don't care when you come in at night?"

S: "They have never told me when to come in. The third night I went out and didn't get in until about two in the morning, and the only thing that happened was that Daniel asked me, "Where were you last night?" I just told him that I had been seeing the town and had a hard time finding a taxi to come home."

V. Discussion and analysis

Even though the student was ambivalent at the time of the interview, two days later he did tell his problem to the Director. Subsequent investigation proved that the student was actually living with a family, not in a boarding house as he had thought. Furthermore, this particular family was not unusual for a middleclass family in Bogotá or in other parts of Latin America. They were especially typical in precisely those aspects which confused and misled this student to the false conclusion that he had been placed in a pensión.

A careful analysis of the process by which the student had arrived at his erroneous conclusion shows that his observations (what he saw and heard) were essentially correct, but that his interpretation of the information received was incorrect because it was based upon unconscious assumptions regarding universal characteristics of the family. These assumptions brought with him from the American culture were not appropriate for the interpretation of events or the classification of groups in the Latin American setting.

His conclusion was not hastily drawn; it was based upon visual and auditory information received over a period of two or three days. The cumulative effect of his interpretations of these several correct observations gave the American student the strong conviction with which he was able to convince the Director that an investigation should be made. These observations, each interpreted in the context of the U.S. cultural pattern, all conspired to present a picture of the group which did not fit the American image of the family, but did fit the image of a boarding house.

Let us examine each of these culturally based assumptions which lead to incorrect conclusions from correct observations.

Assumption #1: The father, mother and children in any family have the same last names unless there are step-children or half-siblings involved.

Details of the difference between the Spanish and the North American systems of naming are presented in another unit.[1] Essentially, the difference is in the fact that the Latin American almost always has two surnames. When the woman marries, she drops her second surname and adds in its place the first surname of her husband. Then the children each have two surnames; their father's first surname is also their first surname and their mother's first surname (maiden name) is their second surname.

The American involved in this particular case actually knew about this system in a superficial way, but he was still led off the track by not instantly realizing that (a) the name Hilda Nieves Contreras was not complete because there is only one surname and two given names. Without the full name there is no way of knowing whether she is married or to whom. She could be Hilda Nieves Contreras de Bernardino, don Alvaro's wife; or Hilda Nieves Contreras Bernardino, perhaps a cousin; or her second surname might be González and she might not be related at all.

Since Doña Hilda had not communicated with her friend in years, it is possible that the friend did not know her married name and so omitted it from the telegram. The actual composition of the household was discovered to be as follows:

Father: Sr. Alvaro Bernardino Ramírez
Mother: Sra. Hilda Nieves Contreras de Bernardino
Sons: Daniel, Armando and Arturo Bernardino Contreras
Daughters: Beatriz and María Bernardino Contreras
Cousins: Carlos Bernardino Rodríguez and José Contreras Moreno

Possibly the American guest would not have been so confused if the telegram had included the mother's second surname, if he had remembered the five children's apellidos instead of those of the two cousins only, or if these two cousins had not been living in the house. The presence of the two cousins brings us to the second cultural assumption which distorted the American's interpretations of his observations.

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[1] Raymond L. Gorden, Spanish Personal Names; As Barriers to Communication between Latin Americans and North Americans, U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D.C. mimeographed, 1968.

Assumption #2: The household unit is a nuclear family composed of parents and their children.

This second assumption may generally fit the North American white, middleclass pattern for families. It was the pattern remembered by this college student, but it does not fit the average middleclass Bogotano family. The American tends to have a more restricted view of kinship relations and attaches more importance to the nuclear family relationships and less to the extended family relationships. Often this restricted definition of kinship leads not only to inability to tell a family from a boarding house in Bogotá, but also leads to a misinterpretation of statements by anthropologists and sociologists to the effect that "in Latin America kinship relationships are more important in the total social organization of the society than would be the case in the United States." After this statement is filtered through the student's interpretive system, it often comes out, "there is much more warmth and togetherness in the Latin American nuclear family than in the U.S.A."

Thus, the American may arrive in Latin American with a double blindness: (a) he assumes that "the family" which shares a household is actually a "nuclear family" and (b) he expects to find a more intimate togetherness among the members of the Latin American household than he was accustomed to in the United States.

In this case both of these expectations were unfulfilled, yet the presence of two non-nuclear family members is certainly not unusual in the Bogotá middleclass. In a sample of 313 persons in 43 of the Bogotano host families a minority (49.2%) were parents and children! Then who comprises the other 50.8% of the population of these households? Table 1 shows that 12.6% are extended family members, 17.6% are boarders and guests, 13.3% are live-in maids and the remaining 7.3% are other part-time help who are in the house on a regular schedule. No wonder the American cannot find the tightly knit nuclear family he is expecting.

TABLE 1

Number and Percent of Persons in General Categories in the Bogotá Host Family Households

	A	%	B	%
Parents	67	21.4	154	49.4
Children	87	28.0		
Extended family	39	12.4	136	43.3
Boarders & guests	55	17.6		
Maids (live-in)	42	13.3		
Other part-time help	23	7.3	23	7.3
Totals	313	100.0	313	100.0

Who are the extended family members? As shown in Table 2, most of them (3.5% of the total 313 members) are aunts or female cousins (2.3%). There are more grandmothers than grandfathers, more aunts than uncles, more female than male cousins, and a sprinkling of nieces and nephews.

It is interesting to note that 67% of the extended family members are females while 33% are males. This is a reflection of the differential longevity in the case of grandparents and of the greater tendancy to shelter the females in the case of cousins and unmarried aunts. In some of the families the American guests felt that an unmarried aunt or female cousin had been reduced almost to the status of a maid since she did not have a job outside the home and felt obligated to do something in return for her board and room. In one case, the person the student felt was the maid was actually a maiden aunt:

> "In my (Colombian) home they are very democratic in their treatment of the maid, nothing like what I hear from other families. Our maid, Victoria, is in her 40's and she is given the run of the house. she sits down and talks with the Señora, she sits on her bed and watches television, she sits and knits and talks when they have friends and neighbors over in the evening. She is treated just like a member of the family. Once in a while I hear the Señora telling her what to do, but it all goes very smoothly."

TABLE 2

The Number and Percentages of Persons in Each Specific Category Found in 43 Colombian Host Households

	f	%
Mothers	39	12.4
Fathers	28	9.
Sons	41	13.1
Daughters	46	14.7
Grandfathers	1	.3
Grandmothers	5	1.6
Uncles	5	1.6
Aunts	11	3.5
Cousins (male)	3	1.
Cousins (female)	7	2.3
Nephews	4	1.3
Nieces	3	1.
Boarders	12	3.9
American guests	43	13.7
Maids (live-in)	42	13.3
Other part-time help	23	7.3
Totals	313	100.

The presence of a maid is another one of the factors which detract from the American's expectation of togetherness in the Latin American family. Only one of the households in this sample did not have a live-in maid, and that was a temporary condition. The maid is the only one in the household who is not treated like an equal or a potential equal. The parents shout at the children and at the maid, but only the children shout back at the parents. The position of a maid in the family structure is formally expressed in the very architecture of the home. Generally, her quarters are spacially separated from the upstairs portion of the house where the family members spend the majority of their time.

The American becomes aware of the degree of institutionalization of the role and status of the maid when he notes that there is a separate bathroom used only by the live-in maid or some of the day help. The maid's bathroom has a toilet which is probably smaller and without a wooden seat. Often the maid's shower is not in a special stall or shower area but consists very simply of a drain in the middle of the small area between the toilet bowl and the lavatory.

In the micro-ecology of the household the maid's quarters are usually as far as possible from the señora's bedroom. They usually have direct access to both the service patio where the washing is done and the kitchen where the meals are prepared. Thus, the overlapping area shared between the maid and the señora consists mainly of the kitchen and dining room. The señor of the family rarely sets foot in the kitchen. The maid shares the dining room with the whole family in that she serves the meals. She usually eats in the kitchen, utility room or her own quarters but rarely in the dining room. The maid's adventures into the living room and upstairs to the hall, bathroom and bedrooms consist of performing specific services like bringing the señora's breakfast or the usual household cleaning duties.

One of the most basic ways in which the function of the maid detracts from the North American's image of the true family is in her effect upon the timing of meals, particularly breakfast. This brings us to the next North American assumption which distorted the student's interpretations.

Assumption #3: The members of a real family eat most of their meals together, particularly breakfast and dinner, since the father and children may not be able to come for lunch.

What proportion of the members of U.S. middleclass families eat which meals together in the home we will not venture to say, but it is clear that most of the North American guests in the Bogotano homes felt that there was much less togetherness at meal time in their Colombian home than in their U.S. home. Just as Robert, the student in the case above, felt a lack of cohesiveness at meal time when he said:

> "Nobody cares when you come or go. Even though we all eat at one big table, never is everybody there at the same time. Even at breakfast there are never more than three people eating at the same time, and I know that there are at least 10 people, counting me, plus the maids. I think there is a maid and a cook both. Anytime you want breakfast you just come downstairs and tell Inés, the maid, that you are ready to eat. Carlos and José eat breakfast at the same time I do. I guess that is because we all have eight o'clock classes. But then we all charge off in different directions."

In this case the speaker does not realize that it was unusual he was eating breakfast with two others. In a sample of 75 host families, most of the North American guests, whether GLCA students or Peace Corps Trainees, ate breakfast alone. This is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

The Percentage of North American Guests Who Usually Eat Each Meal Alone

MEAL	Percent alone
Breakfast	64%
Lunch	12%
Dinner	20%

Those American guests who found themselves often eating breakfast alone at times felt that they were being isolated or segregated by the family. It would sometimes take the guest several weeks or even months to discover that they were not the only members of the household who ate breakfast alone. From many interviews with the American guests as well as the señoras of Colombian host families, we were able to construct some typical meal-time patterns.

Breakfast in a home where there were highschool and college-age children would typically run something like this:

(a) The father rises at 6:00 a.m., shaves, showers, eats breakfast, reads the paper and leaves for work by 7:30 a.m.

(b) The children come down to breakfast anytime between 6:30 and 9:00 depending on when they have to be to class at the colegio or universidad. If they go to the university, they leave alone, but if they go to elementary or highschool, they will nearly always go on a bus furnished by the colegio even if the school is only a few blocks away.

(c) The señora would often have her breakfast at 8:00 or 8:30 served in her room.

In some cases the father or the teenage sons and particularly daughters would have fruit juice or cocfee brought to their room[1] and either come down to a full breakfast later or skip the full breakfast if they are late.

Thus, we see that breakfast time may cover a two-and-a-half-hour span of time during which the members of the family not only eat at different times but in different locations in the house. The Colombian kitchen impresses the American more as a built-in restaurant, ready to serve food at all times of the day. This image is particularly true of breakfast time. Such a protracted meal time is possible only where the maid is indeed built into the household; it is unlikely that a middleclass wife is going to be on duty in the kitchen for four hours (including preparation and doing dishes) merely to see the family through breakfast.

The Colombian pattern at lunch time is quite different. The striking factor to the North American is the proportion of the family members who eat together at lunch time. In the U.S. middle class family with children in highschool or college, living in a city of 2,000,000, we would not expect much togetherness at lunch time in the home. The American father would rarely return from the office for lunch, and the children would eat at the school. In many cases the mother might have a part-time job and not be home for lunch, or she would eat lunch at home alone or eat out while on a shopping jaunt. In the U.S. we generally expect the family to eat breakfast and dinner together, but eating lunch together is considered to be either a small-town or rural pattern. Not so in Latin America! The siesta period at mid-day is still found in many of the major cities and is even more prevalent in small towns in Latin America. In Bogotá the siesta allows most businesses, including retail stores, to close from 12:30 or 1:00 to 2:30 or 3:00 p.m.[1] Almost all white collar workers go home for lunch whether they have a family or live in a pensión or residencia.

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[1] In our sample of host families we found that more than half of the parents had juice, coffee or all of breakfast in the bedroom while about 30% of the daughters and 15% of the sons did so.

2

Many fathers with young children see them only during the lunch period or on weekends. The Colombian father has no time to spend with his children before he leaves for work. Since he typically returns in the evening at about 7:30 p.m., the young children are ready to go to bed after perhaps only exchanging greetings with the father, or in some cases being praised or admonished according to their behavior for the day as reported by the mother.

The Colombian señor is accustomed to having a large noon meal: juice or fruit, soup, meat, potatoes, rice, yuca, desert and coffee would be typical for his noon meal. For most the idea of having a light lunch is unthinkable. The type of meal he is accustomed to at noon appears to the Colombian to be quite costly at a restaurant. Even if money were not a factor, mid-day is a time of relaxation at home.

The American is impressed with the prodigious effort expended to transport most of the downtown working population out of the city and back again at noon. This condenses the morning and evening rush into one two-hour period. Luckily most of the people take buses, but it is an awesome sight to see the caravans of buses accumulating in the main downtown arteries at noon in anticipation of the outbound rush. At peak-load time one can see a continous line of 20 buses in each of two lanes, while the traffic policeman busily works to prevent the buses from occupying the one remaining lane in order to keep it open for taxis and private cars. This same concentration is repeated at many different major pick-up points.

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[1] This varies with local custom. In warmer Río de Janeiro, for example, stores are often closed at noon and open again at 3:30.

Dinner time in the Colombian middleclass home may not involve as much togetherness as does the noon meal. For example, the young children might eat alone 6 or 6:30 in order to go to bed on time. Typically the father would return from work at 7:30. He may come directly home, or he might stop for a drink with friends at a downtown bar. Dinner would be served for him, his wife, the older children, and relatives beginning about 8:00 or 8:30 and finishing between 9:00 and 9:30.

The American living in a Colombian home is particularly likely to obtain the boarding-house impression if he himself does not return home for lunch, but follows the American pattern of eating on-campus or near his place of work.

Assumption #4: In a private family individual members do not lock their bedroom doors, nor would the refrigerator be locked.

To this American the idea of having the refrigerator locked after dinner was completely incompatible with his idea of the family. His reaction was to assume that he was in a boarding house. Others who have encountered this same situation have reacted differently. For example:

(1) "They keep the refrigerator locked after dinner which is about the only time I'm there. Maybe they have heard about the gringos always wanting snacks before bedtime. They should just tell me instead of locking up the refrigerator."

(2) "I realized that locking the refrigerator had something to do with not trusting the maid, because with the last maid they kept it locked most of the time. But they fired her and after the new maid had been with us just a week, the señora didn't lock the refrigerator any more."

We do not intend to give the impression that most middleclass Colombian homes lock the refrigerator, or that all college-age children lock their bedrooms as they leave for the day. In fact in the sample of host families we studied, about

20% of the refrigerators had a lock as part of the standard equipment of the model but only a quarter of these were ever used. Nevertheless, this is different from the pattern in the United States where refrigerators (except commercial size or freezers) rarely have locks, and middleclass families would practically never lock a refrigerator. In the case of miscommunication we are discussing, the fact that the refrigerator was locked was just one more piece of evidence which, when combined with the others, reinforced the American's conviction that he was in a boarding house.

The middleclass American is impressed by the whole security syndrome which is quite different from the U.S. Even though there is no absolute difference in any specific item, the general gestalt of the pattern clearly impresses the American as different. The North American who rents an apartment is amazed upon being presented with ten to twenty keys. There are keys for each room, for each cupboard, and for many drawers.

Many of the American guests in this study felt frustrated with the inconveniences of entering the home at night.

TABLE 4

Guests' Possesion of Key to House

I have my own key	62%
I must ask for key	31%
They never let me have a key	7%

Table 4 shows that, although a majority (62%) of them were allowed to have their own key, the remaining (38%) either had to ask for a key each time they were going to come in late or were never allowed to have a key. The North American is embarrassed to have to wake up the maid or any member of the family to enter the house.

There is more reluctance to give a key to a female than to a male guest because the señora feels responsible for her welfare. It also became clear in some of the interviews with the señoras that whether or not they would give a key to a gringa depended greatly upon how much they trusted the particular girl and felt sure she would not abuse what they perceived as a definite privilege.

Perhaps the most frustrating situation for the North American is to discover that, even though he has finally won possession of one or two keys,[1] he is still unable to gain entrance to the house. Often he has not mastered the proper combination of the two locks, or after he gets the locks open, he finds that the door is also bolted or chained from the inside. It may sound a bit strange to hear a college graduate complain that he cannot get into the house when he has the proper keys, but the cultural pattern also involves locks. First, he discovers that turning the key in the proper direction does not necessarily unlock the door; it may take one, two or even three turns. The second lock may also require a number of turns. To complicate matters, it is not always simple to determine which direction to turn the key because each lock may vary; and when both keys are on the same ring, it requires much more time to discover the proper combination of turns and directions. Finally, when the proper formula has been applied to each of the two locks, the door usually will not open because there is no doorknob. Instead, we must know which of the two keys regulates the latch.

During the first two weeks of their stay in a Bogotano home, about 25% of the Americans complained that they were unable to get in the house even when they had the proper keys. Another 25% complained that even though they had mastered the use of the keys, they still found the door was chained or bolted from inside.

Such difficulties may seem small to the person who has not been in this predicament, but culture shock is often made up of such small things. Cumulative frustration can be triggered into a verbal explosion which, when stripped of its vituperative phrases, would mean "Oh, the natural perversity of inanimate objects!" or less objectively, "Why are Colombians such fearful and cautious people and so thoughtless as to forget that I'm out in the rain?" Often, this relatively small frustration looms large because it comes on the heels of a herd of other small frustrations.

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[1] Two keys were needed to enter a third of the homes.

The North American is aware of the security syndrome in all aspects of the society. He notices that the porcelain tops on the toilet tanks in the train station are chained on, other bits of plumbing are bolted with special frames to the walls, a large portion of the retail stores and offices on the first floor have riot screens of steel mesh pulled down in front of the windows at night, and policemen and soldiers carry rifles and submachineguns routinely rather than the less conspicuous pistol of the American policeman.

The symptoms of physical and material insecurity penetrate the home in many forms. For example, in 80% of the host-family homes the first floor windows which face the street are protected by some form of iron bars, wooden bars, or ornamental ironwork, either inside or outside the window. In some cases where all of the windows on the street are too small for a man to crawl through, no bars are used.

All of these security precautions tend to detract from the North American's image of the home and family; they are more closely associated in his mind with the more formalistic institutions of the college dormitory, or boarding house.

Assumption #5: In a family the children do not address father and mother as "sir" and "m'am."

It is debatable whether this assumption is true for all of the United States today. In years past children in the U.S. were much more formal in addressing their parents, and a father would say "son" rather than using the son's first name. In the rural South this is still more likely to hold than in the urban North. Today forms of address between family member in the U.S. probably differ greatly by region, rural-urban areas, race, and social class. This is a changing pattern in both Colombia and the U.S.A.

Whether this pattern of the child addressing his father as "sir" (señor) and his mother as "m'am" (señora) would impress the American as being alien to the proper behavior between family members would depend on the American's own background. However, the formal address did mislead this particular American, probably because it occurred as part of a pattern.

Summary of case. This case illustrates how the actual meaning derived from verbal messages and observations in a foreign culture is not contained in the words or specific observations alone. Instead, the meaning is a product of the interaction between the specific information received and certain culturally derived assumptions which provide the necessary interpretive context for one's observations.

The observer (or receiver of the verbal message) does not consciously select the assumptions brought into play to code out the meaning of the message. In the absence of assumptions appropriate to the foreign culture, in a particular situation, we automatically tend to fill the assumption-vacuum with those we bring from our own culture.

In this case, all of the relevant assumptions brought into play dealt with the nature of a family household unit. All of these assumptions were more appropriate to the North American than to the Latin American culture, as encountered in this particular instance.

No one bit of information received could have brought about the firm but mistaken conclusion. Instead, the observer's conviction was based upon the cumulative effect of a series of observations and interpretations which provided a convincingly consistent gestalt comprising the boarding-house image in the observer's mind.

VI. Summary

In dealing with the initial few days of immersion in the foreign culture, we have highlighted a variety of problems which may not appear to be particularly obscure, profund or subtle. Nevertheless they are the real problems of communication actually encountered. In many cases such initial misinterpretations of the foreign culture began a trend which increased the American's feeling of ethnocentrism, if not his direct hostility to the foreign culture.

Though foreign exchange programs are often assumed to reduce ethnocentric attitudes in both groups involved, there is evidence that it may have precisely the opposite effect.[1] These early impressions of the other culture may be critical in starting a trend either toward or away from communication.

Even during the short span of time we have dealt with here, we could see the cumulative effect of a series of encounters. For example, after the first misunderstandings with Bogotá taxi drivers, the American began to build a prejudice and a protective defense which gradually became an offense. The student launches a private "preventive war" which might begin with only Bogotano taxi drivers but might spread eventually to include any or all Colombians.

One of the most common symptoms of a mild defense reaction is seen in an American's response to an explanation of the incorrect assumptions which lead to the conclusion that "the taxi driver cheated me." With astonishing frequency the response is, "I don't know about that particular case, but I know for a fact that these Colombian taxi drivers do cheat!" The essential point here is that the American may show little interest in how miscommunication occurs in a particular case, because he is emotionally side-tracked by an effort to prove to his own satisfaction that "they are cheaters." Thus the discussion can deteriorate into an emotionally polarized we-versus-they defense strategy.

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[1] Raymond L. Gorden, "Ethnocentrism and Study Abroad," unpublished study of 40 North Americans, found that the ethnocentric feeling of a majority of the Americans increased during the first six months of their sojourn.

The Colombians, of course, show the same defense reaction viewing the North American. Those Colombians who, for example, see the American tendency to use nicknames as simply another symptom of their "obsession with saving time," do not enjoy having it pointed out that this is doubtful evidence since (a) Colombians who are assumed to not have this obsession also use nicknames, (b) some of the American nicknames are longer than the formal name (as in "Johnny" for "John" or "Tommie" for "Tom"), and (c) the use of nicknames is more common among people spending their leisure time together than among those who are cooperating in some lucrative project. Here again the same defense reaction may divert the discussion from how the mechanism of cross-cultural communication operates to the rhetorical question of "Why are the norteamericanos so obsessed with saving time and making money?" If we are to learn how to communicate more accurately across cultural boundaries, we must find ways to stimulate intellectual curiosity and to relieve emotional defensiveness.

Another basic type of reaction, perhaps more common among those who consider themselves intellectuals, is to say, "How could he have been so insensitive, so ignorant, so unperceptive?" Unfortunately, this question too is often rhetorical, and the person asking it is having precisely the same type of cross-cultural perception difficulties.

The specific pitfalls which catch one person may not be precisely the same as those which trip another, despite the fact that there may be a statistically stable rank order of pitfalls if we compare Americans in the same role (student, for example) and the same situation (catching a taxi cab). Also, it is much easier for one person to see another's stumblings, particularly after the situation has been made explicit.

There are several reasons why it is more difficult to act correctly in a foreign culture than it is to analyze a case study. First is the simple factor of timing. It is much easier to make a decision concerning a written case about which one can think for a minute than to make a decision in the live situation where one may have to respond immediately. This required instant response makes it more necessary to rely on one's own culturally determined reflexes.

Second, the live situation is more complex and has more potential for ambiguity and confusion. This, combined with the time pressure for a spontaneous response, provides some of the essential conditions for the projection of ethnocentric attitudes and prejudices.

Third, the person out of his natural habitat tends to be tense, defensive or agressive in his insecurity. This is not conducive to accurate hearing or observation.

Fourth, one's observations (auditory or visual) may not be concentrated at the right place and time to make full use of normal observation powers. In his own culture where he is familiar with the total context in space and time (physical, psychological and social), a person uses his observation energy efficiently. He unconsciously listens and looks for the key clues to guide his interpretations, judgments and subsequent actions. When we are unfamiliar with the structure and timing of events in the foreign culture, we are often not in rhythm with the most salient demands upon our attention. We are not paying attention to the most crucial clues because we may be either devoting our attention randomly, scanning mechanically, following the physically most salient cues, or searching for these things which fall into the attention pattern formed by our own culture.

Fifth, in the real situation some people arrive at wrong interpretations and conclusions simply because of the cumulative effect of events. This was clearly illustrated in the case of Robert's boarding-house conclusion. No one clue would have sufficed, but the total pattern created a convincing image in his mind.

Sixth, and finally, whether or not a person gets caught in a particular misinterpretation of his observations may depend strictly upon chance. For example, there may be no great time pressure at the moment of crucial observation, thus giving the person time to think. Or a person's attention may just accidentally be focused on the right thing at the right time. Then too, the cumulative effect of a series of observations may depend upon the accidental order in which they came to the observer's attention.

In spite of these factors in the live situation which make it more difficult to analyze than a paper situation, the knowledge given by a case and its analysis is clearly useful in avoiding communication errors.

Advance knowledge of the foreign culture can often avoid drawing erroneous conclusions. For example, had John known that there are various situations in which the taxi fare is more than the amount shown on the meter, he would have avoided a series of misinterpretations of the behavior of taxi drivers which made him start to treat them almost as unfairly as he thought they were treating him.

In many cases advance knowledge about a specific culture pattern will not avoid an error when the situation is first encountered. On the initial encounter with the strange situation, the person has had no practice in recognizing the appropriate clues when they are mixed with a welter of new but irrelevant stimuli. Also, in the practical situation the time pressure to act to avoid blocking on-going activity does not allow the American properly to assess the evidence. In this case he often jumps to a conclusion or acts first, and later realizes that he has acted incorrectly. Then when he encounters the same situation again, he may be able to inhibit the formerly automatic response to avoid the error.

For example, when a Colombian introduces himself to the American and hands him his business card which says "Dr. Enrique Maya González," the American may automatically respond with the Spanish equivalent of "How do you do Doctor González," instead of the appropriate "Doctor Maya." If the American has previous knowledge of the naming system and the corresponding forms of direct and indirect address, he might immediately recognize that he has made an error. Then in the second encounter with a similar situation, he may be able to inhibit the formerly automatic response and to avoid the error.

Even though an American is not preparing to go to Colombia specifically, the foregoing analysis of the two cases illustrating the early adjustment period will help to sensitize him to some general areas of potential mis-communication. He can then be alert for specific patterns in the foreign culture which could act as barriers to communication.

These then are three ways of using case-study materials on cross-cultural communication problems: preventing errors, correcting errors, and sensitizing to areas of potential mis-communication. These all reinforce the one basic aim of augmenting the educational value of being immersed in a foreign culture. Since we do not want to use a cross-cultural experience merely to strengthen our prejudices and ethnocentrism or to collect mis-information through first-hand experience, we must learn to avoid the types of mis-interpretations and distorted conclusions we have illustrated.

We must avoid the vicious circle of converting falacious conclusions into major premises used to arrive at further communication errors. By preventing errors or by more quickly correcting them, we are accepted into a wider variety of situations in which we can participate to obtain a closer look at the culture. Cumulative communication errors will eventually cut off many of the potential avenues of interaction with the people and finally restrict the American to the relatively narrow role of tourist.

Finally, gaining insight into the importance of the silent assumptions comprising the major premise in the communication process makes the foreign experience more interesting by providing a sensitizing framework which enables us to learn more from our own direct experiences abroad.

Appendix I. *Colombianismos*

This is a highly selective list[1] of words which are not used in Colombia according to the standard dictionary definitions. On the basis of interviews with Colombians and with Americans residing in Colombia, we have selected only those which are most commonly used and which are not in the category of rapidly passing slang or vulgarism.

a la orden	*A la orden*, señora? (*May I help you*, lady?) Muchas gracias, Carlos. *A la orden*, Miguel. (Thank you Carlos. *Don't mention it*, Miguel.)
amañarse	*Se amaña* en Colombia? (Are you *feeling at home* in Colombia?) *Se amaña* en su nueva oficina? (*Do you like* your new office?)
ala, alita	(Term of familiarity, very much used in Bogotá) Qué hubo, *ala*, cómo te va?
asqueroso-a	Este limosnero es *asqueroso*. (This beggar is *filthy*, *disgusting*)
aterrado-a	Estoy *aterrado* de pensar en todo lo que tengo que hacer. (I'm *shocked* to think of all the things I have to do.)
a todo taco	Dieron una fiesta *a todo taco*. (They *went all out* for the party)
biche	Esa naranja está *biche*. (That orange is *not* ripe.)
related: Madurarse biche	Yo no quiero que Margarita se *madure biche*. (I don't want Margarita to act like a grown up girl.) This term is applied specially to young girls, 12 to 16 - who want to act like grown-up ladies.
botaratas	Carlos es un *botaratas*. (Charles *wastes money*.) (Same form for feminine)

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[1] Many of these were selected from a list prepared by Antoine Kattah Fayad of the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá and Yolanda Lastra of the University of California at Los Angeles, Department of Linguistics.

capul	Voy al salón de belleza a que me corten la capul. (I am going to the beauty parlor to have my bangs cut.)
coca-colo-a	Nos invitaron a una fiesta de coca-colos. (We were invited to a teenagers' party.)
comer pavo	María comió pavo toda la noche. (Mary was not asked to dance during the whole party. She was a wallflower.)
conchudo-a	Arturo es muy conchudo, se auto invitó a comer anoche. (Arturo has really got nerve. He invited himself to dinner last night.)
corbata	Le salió una corbata en una embajada. (He got an easy job at an embassy.)
cuca	Alicia esta cuca hoy. (Alicia looks cute today.) Voy a comprar cucas a la panadería. (I'm going to the bakery to buy some molasses cookies). Caution: In some areas cuca is vulgar.
chécheres	Tengo una cantidad de chécheres. (I have so much junk.)
chicote	Mi abuelo fuma chicote. (My grandfather smokes cigars.) Váyase al chicote! (Don't bother me!)
chichonera	Se armó la chichonera. (A row started). Hay una chichonera para entrar a toros. (There is a lot of people to go into the bullring).
chimbo	Me pagaron con un cheque chimbo. (They paid me with a bad check). Me encantan los huevos chimbos. (I love egg yolks dessert).
chino-a	Juana tiene cinco chinos. (Juana has five small children.) (Also is a term of familiarity) Qué tal, chino?
chisga	Fué una chisga comprar este vestido en $300. (It was a bargain to buy this dress for $300).

chiva	Subámonos en esta chiva. (Let's get on this old bus). Cuál fué la mejor chiva de la semana? (Which was the best piece of news this week?)
chulear	Chulee los nombres de los candidatos que le gustan. (Check the names of the candidates you like).
chulo	Marque con un chulo la respuesta correcta. (Put a check mark on the correct answer.) Cuando se paran los chulos en la torre de la iglesia. (When the buzzards stand on the church tower). Jorge es un chulo sinverguenza. (Jorge is a no-good gigolo).
churro	Cuándo me presentas ese churro? (When will you introduce me to that nice looking girl?) (This also refers to a nice looking man).
chusco-a	Una fiesta chusca (A good party) Una profesora chusca. (A pretty teacher) Un paseo chusco. (An enjoyable picnic) Un vestido chusco. (A pretty dress)
embolador	Necesito un embolador para que me embole los zapatos. (I want a shoe-shine boy to shine my shoes).
echar cepillo	No me gusta echar cepillo. (I don't like to polish the apple).
embolatado-a	Estoy embolatado con esta traducción. (I am confused with this translation). Mañana voy a estar muy embolatada. (Tomorrow I'm going to be very busy).
invierno	Esta semana hemos tenido mucho invierno. (This week it has rained a lot).
jalado-a	Cuando Carlos está jalado es muy simpático. (When Charles is drunk he is very nice.)
jalar	Le jala al aguardiente. (He goes for aguardiente). No le jalo a ese programa. (I don't go for that kind of program).
jurgo	Había un jurgo de gente en la reunión. (There were lots of people at the party).

lagarto	Lo ascendieron por lagarto. (He got a promotion because he is an opportunist). Es un lagarto. (He is a person who does absolutely nothing).
limpio	Fuí a comer a ese restaurante y me dejaron limpio. (I went to that restaurant and I came out flat broke.) Pagué el arriendo hoy y me quedé limpio. (Today I paid the rent and now I'm broke).
macho-a	Que pelea tan macha. (What a violent fight). Eduardo no le tiene miedo a nadie, es muy macho. (Eduardo is not afraid of anybody, he is very courageous.)
maluco-a	Hoy me siento maluco. (I feel a little bit ill today).
mamola	Qué nos pagan esta tarde? Mamola! (You say we'll get paid this afternoon? I doubt it!)
medias nueves	Quiero un vaso de leche para las medias nueves. (I want a glass of milk for my mid-morning snack).
miércoles	Miércoles, se me olvidó pagar la cuenta de la luz. (Oh, gosh I forgot to pay the light bill).
mono-a	Mira esa mona tan bonita! (Look at that pretty blonde) Que vestido tan mono tienes puesto! (What a pretty dress you have on!)
ni de fundas	No lo hago ni de fundas! (I won't do it for the world!)
ni de riesgos	No voy a esa fiesta ni de riesgos! (I won't go to the party for anything).
ñapa	Compré un vestido y me dieron este pañuelo de ñapa. (I bought a suit and they gave me a handkerchief as a present.) (Something given extra when a purchase is made.)
onces	Vamos a tomar onces. (Let's get an afternoon snack). Nos invitaron a tomar las onces. (We were invited for tea).

pachanga	Fuimos a una pachanga deliciosa. (We went to a wild party).
pagar a la americana	Vamos a la fiesta pero si pagamos a la americana todos los gastos. (Let's go to the dance as long as we go Dutch).
pajudo-a	No le creas a Manuel, es un pajudo. (Don't believe a word Manuel says, he is full of hot air).
parar bolas	No le paro bolas a ese chisme. (I don't pay any attention to that gossip).
pasar un parte	Me pasaron un parte por mal estacionamiento. (I got a ticket for parking in a prohibited zone).
pato	No me gusta ir de pato a ninguna fiesta. (I don't like to go to parties without being invited). Vamos al grill pero yo pago también porque no me gusta ir de pato. (Let's go to the night club but I will also pay because I don't like the idea of not paying).
pela	Porque perdió el año le dieron una pela. (Because he failed he got a whipping).
pelado-a	Cuántos pelados hay en esta clase? (How many children are there in this class?). No puedo invitarte hoy a cine porque estoy pelado. (I can't ask you to go to the movies because I am broke).
pereque	No ponga tanto pereque! (Don't bother so much). Le voy a poner un pereque. (I am going to ask you a favor). No es ningún pereque traerle lo que me encargó de San Andrés. (It is no bother to bring you what you want from San Andrés).
picho-a	La papaya está picha! (The papaya is too ripe). Qué película tan picha! (What a bad movie!) Qué comida tan picha! (What a bad food). Los Fernández están pichos en plata. (The Fernández have a lot of money). Caution: In some areas picha is vulgar.

pisco	Vamos a matar el *pisco* para la Nochebuena. (We are going to kill the *turkey* for Christmas). Ese es un buen *pisco*. (That is a good *guy*). Caution: *Pisca* means a *slut*).
poner bolas	No le *pongo muchas bolas* a la clase de inglés. (I don't *pay much attention* to my English class). Esa niña bonita me está *poniendo bolas*. (That pretty girl is *flirting* with me).
provocar	Te *provoca* ir a cine? (*Would you like* to go to the movies?).
puente	Nos invitaron a pasar el *puente* en tierra caliente. (They asked us to spend the *long week-end* (*holidays*) in the hot country).
qué guama	*Qué guama*, se me olvidó la lección! (*Darn it*, I forgot the lesson).
rancho	Se vende *rancho*. (*Canned goods* are sold here). Qué *rancho* tan feo! (What a *horrible house*).
rolo-a	Los calentanos no quieren a los *rolos*. (The people from the hot country don't like the people from Bogotá).
sancocho	Esta oficina está hecha un *sancocho*. (This office is *up-side down*).
tapia	Las casas de los caciques estaban rodeadas de *tapias*. (The cacique houses were surrounded by *adobe walls*). Es sorda como una *tapia*. (She is completely *deaf*). Está sordo como una *tapia* a mis consejos. (He *doesn't want to hear* my advice).
tipo-a	Mire ese *tipo* tan bién vestido. (Look at that well-dressed *guy*). Qué señora tan *tipa*. (What a funny lady). Caution: Quién era esa *tipa* que iba contigo anoche? (Who was that *slut* that was with you last night?)
tocar	Me toca trabajar el domingo. (I *have to* work next Sunday).

tragado-a	Fernando está tragado de Margarita. (Fernando is head over heels in love with Margarita). Se lo tragó la manigua. (He went native in the jungle).
váyase al chorizo	Usted quiere que vaya a hacerle esta diligencia inmediatamente. No puedo. Váyase al chorizo! (You want me to go right away to do this. I can't. Go to hell). (This expression is not as strong in Spanish as it is in English).
verano	Hoy hizo verano. (It was sunny and hot today).